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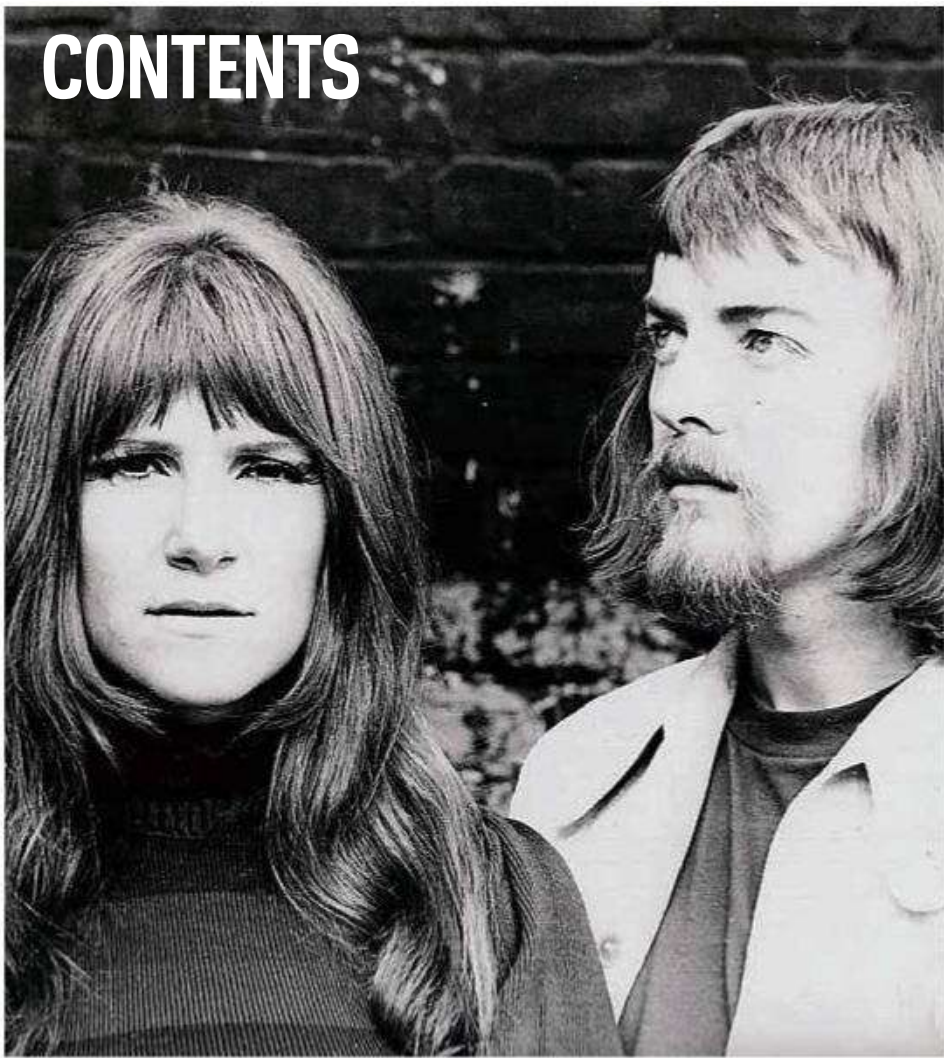
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COVER IMAGE: ETIENNE GILFILLAN
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FORTEAN TIMES 403

Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Dyatlov Pass revisited, Robowolves, dancing starlings and medical impostors...

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EDITOR
DAVID SUTTON
drsutton@forteantimes.com

FOUNDING EDITORS
BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

NEWS EDITOR
CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE (csjosiffe@forteantimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR
ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
ABIGAIL MASON

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
www.managemymags.co.uk
customercare@subscribe.forteantimes.com

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Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)330 333 9492

LICENSING & SYNDICATION
FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT:
Senior Group Licensing Manager
CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3840
carlotta_serantoni@dennis.co.uk
Licensing Content Manager
NICOLE CREASEY TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3998
nicole_creasey@dennis.co.uk

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MD SPECIALIST DIVISION
DHARMESH MISTRY
dharmesh_mistry@
dennis.co.uk

NEWSTRADE DIRECTOR
DAVID BARKER
david_barker@dennis.co.uk

FOREIGN SALES
hello@marketforce.co.uk

**SENIOR NETWORK
PRODUCTION MANAGER**
LAWRENCE BROOKES
lawrence_brookes@
dennis.co.uk

**GROUP ADVERTISING
DIRECTOR SPECIALIST**
ANDREA MASON
020 3890 3814
andrea_mason@
dennis.co.uk

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
HELEN RUANE
020 3890 3899
helen_ruane@
dennis.co.uk

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED
CFO
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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RICHARD KERR
JAMES TYE
FELIX DENNIS

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

HAVING YOUR SAY



FORTEAN TIMES READER SURVEY 2021

Readers often write in or email to let us know what they think of *Fortean Times*. Usually, it's to comment on an item or story in a recent issue, and sometimes a few kind words of encouragement or a bit of criticism are appended. Similarly, people air their thoughts on Facebook or Twitter – mostly, but not always, politely – and this too is helpful. We've realised, though, that it's been a long time since we last asked readers for their feedback directly and that now – while we're all stuck at home – might be a good time to do so.

What would be useful for us – and, we hope, for you too – is to get a better sense of what you're currently enjoying (or not) in the magazine than one-off comments or generalised brickbats and bouquets can provide. Do we devote too much space to 'weird news' when you'd rather see an extra feature article? Are there particular regular columns that should be expanded, truncated or axed? Should we review comics as well as books, or games as well as films? Are there areas of forteana we should be covering that we're not? Or subjects that we've devoted too much space to at the expense of other, more important ones?

We want to keep *FT* relevant to readers' interests as well as our own, so please help us to improve the magazine by getting involved and doing a brief survey that will provide us with a clearer picture of what you'd like to see in these pages. All we'd ask you to do is to visit the *FT* Facebook page, where you will find a pinned post containing the survey, which should only take about five minutes to complete. Copy and paste the questions into an email, give a response in CAPS next to each item and, if you'd like to, add your own comments at the end. Then, send the email back to us at: surveyFT2021@gmail.com.

We will collate the responses and share our findings in a future issue. We'll also put all respondents' names in a hat, from which one lucky winner will be pulled and subsequently showered with *FT* goodies.

So, go to <https://www.facebook.com/ForteanTimes/> to get started – and many thanks in advance for your help.

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ERRATA

FT393:12: "Five-million-year-old dinosaur remains" should have read "fossil mammal bones". Thanks to Ed Brewster and Pete Swindells.

FT397:23: Pete also noted an error in *Mythconceptions* (as did Larry Womack via Facebook). "Princess Sophia lived from 1630 to 1714, not 1613 to 1740. Had she lived for another two months she would have become Queen of England. As it was, her son became George I in 1714. Sophia is the present Queen's great (x7) grandmother."

FT398:39: Norman Darwen of Bolton cleared up some confusion in Alan Murdie's feature on moving statues, which referred to "Whalley or Salley Abbey" in Lancashire. Norman writes: "The two abbeys near Clitheroe are Whalley and *Sawley* – the names rhyme. Sawley is right next to the River Ribble, and the Abbey is now a ruin, seven miles away from Whalley Abbey. Local legend is supposed to state that the River claims a life every year."

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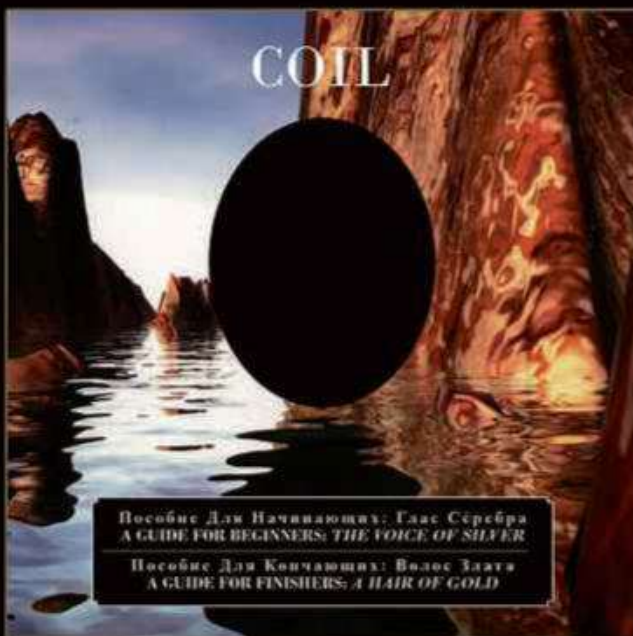
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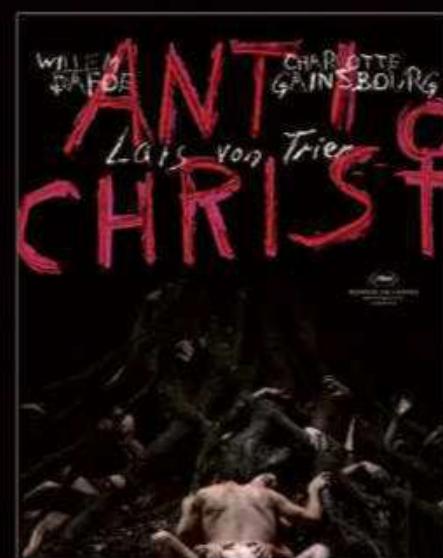


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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

THE DYATLOV PASS MYSTERY

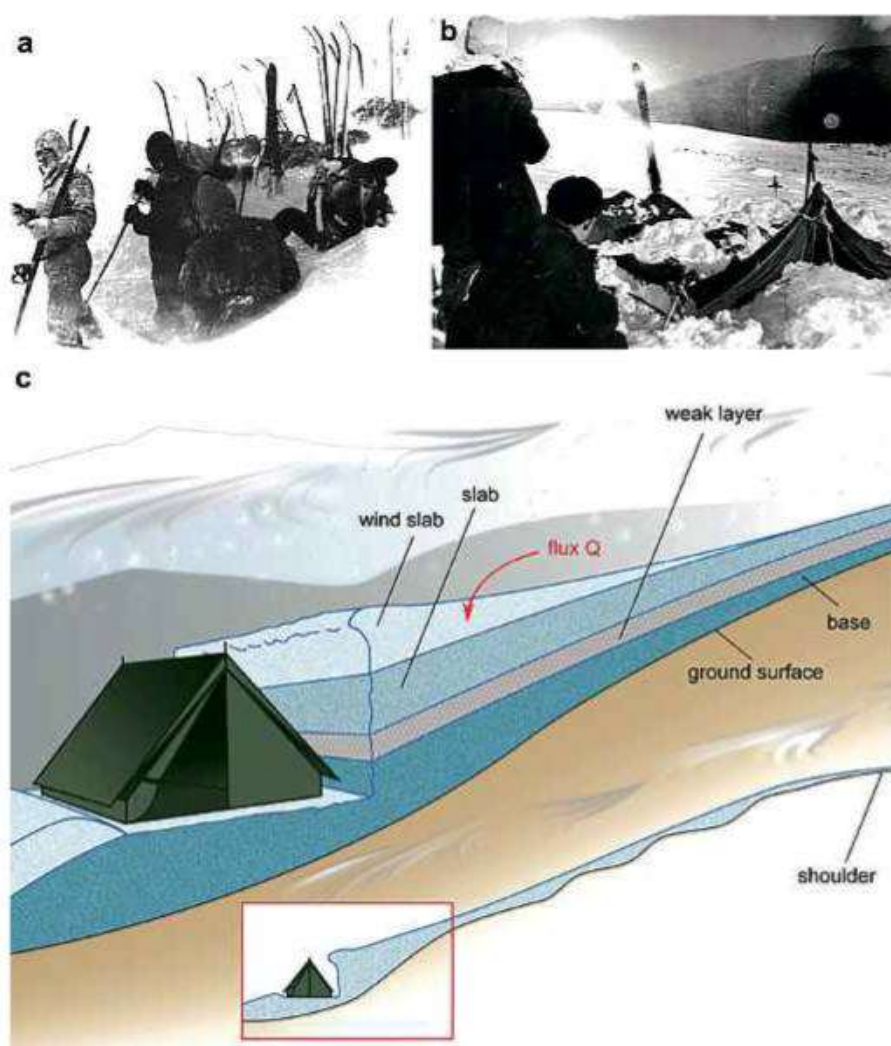
New study suggests an avalanche caused mysterious deaths of hikers

A recent study published in *Communications: Earth & Environment* journal¹ proposes that the mysterious deaths of nine Russian hikers at Dyatlov Pass during a skiing expedition (see FT245:30-45, 377:4) were due to an avalanche.

On 1 February 1959, Igor Dyatlov and his eight companions decided to set up camp on the slope of Kholat Saykhl (which means 'Dead Mountain' in the local tribal language) in the northern Ural Mountains. Several hours later, around midnight, something occurred that caused the hikers to cut the tent from the inside and seek shelter in a forest over 1km (0.6 miles) away.

Twenty-six days later, five bodies were discovered at the edge of the forest. That they had fled suddenly was evident from the bodies being found barefoot and clad only in underwear. These and one other victim's cause of death were determined as hypothermia (the temperature at midnight – exacerbated by an Arctic cold front, winds of 45-67mph (72-107km/h) and a snowstorm – was established to have been as cold as -40°C).

Two months afterwards, the bodies of the remaining four hikers were found further into the woods, three of them having sustained fatal chest or head wounds. Two had missing eyes, one was without their tongue and another lacked eyebrows. The original criminal investigation report from 1959 found that "a compelling natural force" had been responsible for the nine deaths, a tantalisingly



ABOVE: Photographs taken at the tent location shortly before and weeks after the incident, and a sketch of the slope before the incident; a figure from the study.

vague phrase.

An avalanche was also the explanation arrived at by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in 2019 (the 60th anniversary of the incident), after a four-year investigation. This explanation is regarded by some as inconsistent with the victims' injuries, with a lack of evidence of post-avalanche debris, and with the precise location unlikely to generate an avalanche.

But Johan Gaume and Alexander M Puzrin, the

article's authors, claim to have demonstrated by means of physical simulation that a combination of irregular topography, the cut made in the slope where the tent was installed, and strong winds all led to an accumulation of snow above and behind the tent. This 'slab' of snow was, they suggest, dislodged some hours after the hikers had set up camp. Gaume and Puzrin say that "dynamic avalanche simulations" combined with data from crash tests indicate that even a relatively small snow slab could

lead to serious but non-lethal injuries consistent with those reported in the post-mortems. Avalanches usually don't cause such severe injuries "because impacts rarely occur against stiff obstacles. In the Dyatlov case [however], the victims were trapped between the falling slab and the tent floor, which was placed on compacted snow reinforced by skis".

But even if an avalanche were capable of causing the catastrophic wounds sustained by the victims, it is unclear why some were found barefoot and almost naked and why they had fled to the nearby forest. Footprints leading away from the tent were inconsistent with a group of nine people running in panic. All the footprints leading towards the forest were consistent with individuals walking at a normal pace.

Still less clear is why traces of radioactivity were found on one victim's clothes, and why a nearby camping group described seeing glowing orange spheres in the sky that night. Among the numerous explanations for the tragedy are: infrasound-induced panic, attacks by animals, Yetis or local tribesmen, a secret weapon experiment, or a romantic dispute. The absence of eyewitnesses ensures that the explorers' deaths are destined to remain a mystery. Despite Gaume and Puzrin's findings, it is certain the case will continue to exert a grim fascination, and that researchers will continue to posit other explanations for the tragic events of 1 February 1959.

¹ Vol.2, 10 (2021), Gaume, J, Puzrin, AM 'Mechanisms of slab avalanche release and impact in the Dyatlov Pass incident in 1959'; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-020-00081-8>.



AN ANCIENT LEGACY

Neanderthal genes and Covid-19

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DODGY DOCTORS

Fake medics and lecherous lecturers

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SANTA CLAUS TURF WARS

So where does Father Christmas live?

PAGE 26

UNCLE JOE'S DINER

Stalin-themed shawarma joint falls foul of Moscow authorities



ABOVE: A woman walks past the Stalin Doner kebab shop at Zoi and Aleksandra Kosmodemyanskikh Street in north-west Moscow.

Stalin Doner, a Joseph Stalin-themed Moscow takeaway selling coffee and shawarma (the tasty street food snack comprising slices of meat served in a wrap or pitta, accompanied by chopped or shredded vegetables, pickles and assorted condiments) has been forced to close, shortly after its opening. There were complaints about the shop's branding, which featured the Soviet dictator's portrait, and about shop staff uniforms – those of Soviet-era security service officers. Stalin Doner's menu featured dishes named after Stalin himself, his infamous NKVD security service chief Lavrentiy Beria, and Nikita Khrushchev.

Owner Stanislav Voltman explained how police had initially ordered him to take down the Stalin sign, but said that "colossal pressure" from municipal authorities later forced him to close Stalin Doner altogether. Local residents had filed a complaint, but Mr Voltman insisted

there were no legal reasons for closure. He intends to reopen his controversial but lucrative shawarma shop as soon as he can hire new staff. Two previous employees had left due to unwanted police attention, he said: "There are people who are interested, but not everyone is willing to work under the conditions surrounding my poor spot."

Conservative estimates put the number of Soviet citizens killed under Stalin's regime at 3 million, with 1.2 million executions or deaths in detention during the Great Purge of 1937-1938. Of the 18 million people who passed through the Gulag labour camp system between 1930 and 1953, an estimated 1.7 million died. In addition, between 3 and 12 million Ukrainians died during the Holodomor (Great Famine)

of 1932-1933, regarded by many historians as intentional Soviet state policy, and by some as deliberate genocide.

Post-Soviet Russia has seen the rehabilitation of Stalin; once regarded as a bloody tyrant, he is now feted as a strongman who defeated Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and a leader who transformed Russia from a backward, feudal country to a world power through his rapid industrialisation programmes. Vladimir Putin is in part responsible for Stalin's renewed popularity, having revived the Soviet anthem, Soviet-style military parades, and reinstated a Soviet-era medal for labour during his presidency. In recent polling, 70 per cent of Russians approve of Stalin's role in history. *themoscowtimes.com*, 11 Jan 2021.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FAME FROM MEETING QUEEN 'MADE DOG TRAINER A MONSTER'

D.Telegraph, 8 Jan 2021.

RSPB swallows doormat

RSPB Magazine, Winter 2020.

AUSSIE BATS FALL IN A HEAP

Melbourne Herald Sun, 29 Dec 2020.

Defendant 'slapped' by 7ft 5in man he is accused of killing

Irish Times, 4 Mar 2020.

SCIENTIST UNEARTHS A COLONY OF MUMMIFIED PENGUINS IN ANTARCTICA

Smithsonian Magazine, 2 Oct 2020.

Body of 28-year-old man discovered in Newport cemetery

walesonline.co.uk, 4 Jan 2020.

SERGEI FADEICHEV / TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES



SIDELINES...

GET STUFFED

Following a tip-off from a concerned member of the public, an Oregon sheriff's deputy investigated a possible big cat on the loose. The caller said the animal looked like a cheetah, "but did not appear to be aggressive." The deputy said he arrived on the scene and used his "ninja-like skills" to sneak up on the animal, which turned out to be a stuffed toy. *[UPI] 21 Dec 2020.*

TAKING THE PISS

Online delivery company Ocado were in hot water after a customer found three bags of urine with her food order. Michelle Leonard, 42, threw all the food away after discovering the pee-filled carrier bags. "This order was for my birthday," she said. "It wasn't massive amounts of shopping but having urine delivered with your shopping is just disgusting." An Ocado spokesperson said the error was "unacceptable" and that they were "investigating it as a matter of urgency". *D.Telegraph, 19 Nov 2020.*

NAZI MONKEY

Russian prosecutors have launched an investigation after a monkey wearing a Nazi uniform performed at a state circus. The show also featured goats wrapped in Nazi swastika flags. The Udmurtia Circus performance in the city of Izhevsk had been commissioned by the Russian Orthodox Church to symbolise the 'spurning' of Nazism. Russian law forbids public displays of Nazi symbols, but the Church insists it is covered by an exemption allowing the display of Nazi symbols providing they "create a negative attitude to Nazi ideology". *BBC News, 13 Jan 2021.*

COVID CORNER | Unconvincing excuses for flouting lockdowns, plus China's Covid cover-up



ABOVE: Czech police have words with the 'artistic practical joker' who broke the curfew to walk his stuffed toy dog.

CZECH CURFEW CHEAT

Police in the Czech Republic caught a man violating Covid-19 restrictions as he attempted to flout the curfew by walking a stuffed toy dog on a leash. The 9pm curfew bans people from walking out of doors unless exercising a pet. A Czech news crew accompanying the police patrol in Ceske Budejovice were on hand to film officers apprehending the miscreant. He initially claimed to be out walking the dog, but after police determined the object at the end of his leash to be a stuffed toy dog, he changed his story and claimed it was an artistic practical joke. He was released with a warning. *upi.com, 5 Nov 2020.*

CORONA EXPLOSION

Nine coronavirus patients being treated at a hospital in southern Turkey were killed when an oxygen ventilator exploded. The blast caused a fire in the intensive care unit of Sanko University Hospital in Gaziantep. The victims were aged between 56 and 85. The hospital has mounted an investigation to establish the cause of the explosion. In November, a fire at a hospital in Romania killed 10 patients receiving treatment

for Covid-19, when a medical appliance caught fire, igniting a nearby oxygen cylinder. In October, more than 150 patients at a temporary coronavirus hospital in the Russian region of Chelyabinsk had to be evacuated when an explosion in an "oxygen booth" caused a fire. *BBC News, 20 Dec 2020.*

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

Police officers visited a house in Basingstoke one weekend in January 2021 after numerous reports of a party there, breaching Covid-19 rules forbidding different households from mixing with each other. The hosts told police they were "unaware of the global pandemic, as they never watch the news." Hampshire constabulary later tweeted about the incident, alongside the hashtag #ThereAreNoWords. *vice.com, 18 Jan 2021.*

RATTY'S DELIGHT

Britain's rat population is thought to have risen by 30 million during the pandemic lockdowns, with closed hospitality industry workplaces being used as nesting and breeding sites. Rats can breed very quickly, having up to six litters a year with between six and 12 pups in a litter. The youngsters are themselves able

to breed within a year. Rat experts estimate there are now 150 million of the rodents living in the UK – around 2.2 rats per person. The old adage that one is never more than 6ft (1.8m) away from a rat is now more likely to be correct than ever before.

Rats only require a small hole to enter a building, and with so many shops, restaurants and pubs empty, they have been able to find shelter and breed undisturbed. Furthermore, during the most severe lockdown measures where only takeaway food is available, there is still a large amount of food waste on Britain's streets. Pest controllers say they have received around 25 per cent more calls during 2020. City centres have seen the greatest rodent population increase, with London leading the way at 20 million rats, followed by Birmingham with 2.4 million, Leeds with 1.7 million, and 1.3 million rats in Glasgow. *D.Telegraph, 25 Nov 2020.*

RASH PRECAUTION

Chinese flight attendants have been advised to wear nappies to reduce the risk of coronavirus infection. "It is recommended that cabin crew wear disposable nappies and avoid using the lavatories barring special circumstances." *<i>, 22 Dec 2020.*





CHINA ACCUSED OF COVID SECRECY

The US State Department has issued a document ('Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology') accusing China's ruling Communist Party of a "deadly obsession with secrecy and control" that is preventing a proper investigation into the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic. A World Health Organisation (WHO) enquiry team has been sent to Wuhan, but at present it is unclear whether China will allow the team to visit the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), thought by some to be the source of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes the Covid-19 illness).

The formerly prevailing hypothesis that the virus originated in a Wuhan 'wet market' is now being questioned, even among figures high up in the Chinese administration. Instead, some are positing that SARS-CoV-2 accidentally escaped the laboratory owing to insufficient security precautions. In July 2020, former head of MI6 Sir Richard Dearlove suggested the virus had been man-made, but had been leaked by accident: "I subscribe to the theory... that it's an engineered escapee from the Wuhan Institute [of Virology]," he argued. "I am not saying anything other than it was the result of an accident and that the virus is the consequence of gain-of-function experiments that were being conducted in Wuhan, which I don't think are particularly sinister." Earlier in 2020, British government ministers were given an intelligence briefing which "did not rule out that the virus first spread to humans after leaking from a Wuhan laboratory".

The US State Department is not suggesting the virus was intentionally engineered or deliberately released, and indeed are careful to state they have "not determined whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan." It is possible SARS-CoV-2 "emerged naturally from human contact with infected animals, spreading in a pattern consistent with a natural epidemic," but alternatively, the document says, "a laboratory accident could

resemble a natural outbreak if the initial exposure included only a few individuals and was compounded by asymptomatic infection." They point to several previous virus outbreaks in China and elsewhere that were the result of accidental infections in labs, including a 2004 SARS outbreak in Beijing that infected nine people, killing one.

The fact sheet says the US government has "reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both Covid-19 and common seasonal illnesses." This, it argues, "raises questions about the credibility of WIV senior researcher Shi Zhengli's public claim that there was 'zero infection' among the WIV's staff and students of SARS-CoV-2 or SARS-related viruses." WIV scientists were, the document states, working with RaTG13, a bat coronavirus 96.2 per cent genetically similar to SARS-CoV-2 "under conditions that increased the risk for accidental and potentially unwitting exposure." This research began in 2016 or earlier "with no indication of a stop prior to the Covid-19 outbreak", using samples taken from a cave in Yunnan province in 2013 after several miners died of a SARS-like illness.

The State Department insists the WHO investigation team must be given access to the WIV's records of its work on bat and other coronaviruses prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. In particular, they emphasise, the WHO "must have a full accounting of why the WIV altered and then removed online records of its work with RaTG13 and other viruses".

The fact sheet also suggested that the WIV has been involved in military work, even though it is ostensibly a civilian institution, stating that the United States has "for many years" raised public concerns about China's past biological weapons work, "which Beijing has neither documented nor demonstrably eliminated, despite its clear obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention". The US (and others), it said,

had assisted the WIV in its research, either by funding or via scientific collaboration, and now had a right to know whether any of its research funding had been diverted to secret Chinese military projects. The US has now determined that the WIV collaborated with the Chinese military on publications and secret projects, with classified research (including laboratory animal experiments) on behalf of the Chinese military going back to 2017 or earlier.

The lab's flat denial of the possibility of a leak, together with China's recent suggestions that the pandemic could have originated in another country, are, the State Department argues, part of the CCP's approach to devoting "enormous resources to deceit and disinformation". Thus, the scale of the initial Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan was covered up, with the release of vital information delayed, allowing the virus to spread. Doctors on the ground in Wuhan sharing first-hand information between each other about the new respiratory illness were silenced, and, notably, citizen journalist Zhang Zhan who reported on the initial outbreak was jailed in December for four years for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" (see **FT402:7**). *www.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology*, 15 Jan; *sky.com*, 17 Jan; *Mail on Sunday*, 17 Jan 2021.

MAGIC POTION FAIL

Sri Lanka's health minister, who publicly endorsed sorcery and magic potions to help reduce the rising coronavirus infection rate on the island, has herself tested positive. Pavithra Wanniarachchi publicly drank and recommended a magic potion, later revealed to contain honey and nutmeg. It had been made by a sorcerer who claimed it would confer lifelong immunity. She also poured a pot of blessed water into a river last November after a self-described god-man told her this would end the pandemic. Sri Lanka's government approved emergency use of the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine hours after Ms Wanniarachchi tested positive. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Jan 2021.

SIDELINES...

HOO POO PROTEST

The villagers of Hoo in Kent, which is near an Amazon depot, were so fed up at seeing lorry drivers defecating on grass verges that they left a toilet bowl and cistern out on a verge to shame the loose-bowelled truckers. But a roll of toilet paper, also left on display, was stolen. Drivers park outside the depot as they have to pay to use facilities in the warehouse. Villagers complain that "dozens a day" use the grass verges to do their business. "There's shit everywhere," said one angry local. *Sun*, 5 Dec 2020.

BUM RAP

Two men were caught burgling a house in Stoke-on-Trent when one of them sat on his phone and accidentally dialled 999 mid-crime. The hapless pair were described by Chief Inspector John Owen as the "world's unluckiest burglars". He explained how his officers had received the unusual call, hearing "all of their antics up to the point of hearing our patrols arrive to arrest them". Two men aged 49 and 42 were taken into custody. *BBC News*, 7 Jan 2021.

EVIL EMPIRE

Google has apologised after its Ukrainian to Russian function in Google Translate rendered 'Russia' as 'Mordor'. 'Russians' was translated as 'occupiers' and Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov became "sad little horse". Google denied hackers were responsible for the unusual translations, instead blaming a "technical error". *D.Telegraph*, 7 Jan 2016.

CANNIBAL SANDWICH

US health experts have begged Midwesterners to forgo the so-called 'cannibal sandwich' – a slice of bread topped with raw minced beef, onions and pepper. The dish was first served to University of Colorado students as part of the Packer Day Feast, in honour of Alferd Packer's ill-fated 1873 expedition in which five explorers reputedly died and were eaten. Otherwise known as 'tiger meat' or 'wildcat', the delicacy is responsible for hundreds of people falling ill each year. Wisconsin's department of health stated: "Eating raw meat is NEVER recommended". *D.Telegraph*, 21 Dec 2020.



SIDELINES...

ROWLING IN IT

While clearing out unwanted items in her Blackpool home, Karen Rumsey, 59, found a copy of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Her daughter put it in a 50p book box in preparation for a car boot sale, but decided at the last minute to check its value. As one of 500 copies of the first Harry Potter book's initial print run, the hardback was sold for £50,000 by Hansons auctioneers on 11 December. *D.Mail*, 4 Dec 2020.

BROADMOOR BREAK-IN

A couple were detained after attempting to break into Broadmoor hospital in Berkshire, the high-security psychiatric institution for the criminally insane. Broadmoor houses some of the most dangerous people in Britain, with a variety of severe mental illnesses and personality disorders, like Princess Anne's attempted kidnapper Ian Ball and Kenneth Erskine, the Stockwell Strangler. Former residents include London nail bomber David Copeland, gangster Ronnie Kray and Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper. Police scrambled a helicopter and arrested a man from Essex and a woman from Ipswich, both aged 45. *Sun*, 7 Dec 2020.

LEGWORK

Justin Fernandes, 24, was walking home from work in Toronto when he was struck by a motorcycle, severing his right leg. He decided to have the limb preserved as a way to deal with the complex emotions associated with losing a limb and says this has given him a way to move forward. He received the taxidermied leg in time for Christmas. "You grieve however you feel is the right way to grieve. It's your loss," he says. Now he just needs to figure out where to display the severed leg. *ctvnews.ca*, 24 Dec 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

ANIMAL ANTICS

Feline environment minister, axe-wielding dog and starling saboteurs



ABOVE: Starlings filmed bouncing on power lines. BELOW: The lucky cat rescued from a garbage separating machine and subsequently made Deputy Environment Minister.

THE STARLING DANCE

The mystery of an unexplained series of power outages across a small Scottish town has been solved after video footage revealed the cause to be starlings dancing on power lines. At dusk, the combined mass of starlings in a murmuration was found to be responsible for bouncing overhead electricity lines, which caused circuits to trip, thus bringing about an interruption to the electricity supply.

The starlings' antics were first discovered by Neil McDonald, a Scottish Power engineer, who had been investigating the mysterious power cuts by regularly examining the overhead lines. He cracked the case while on an evening walk to check the lines, using a cameraphone to capture the spectacle: "In all my 14 years working for SP energy networks I have never seen anything like it," he said. "For all the birds looked small, the sheer number of them caused the wires to bounce up and down as they danced on and off."

Thousands of birds weighed down the lines each time they landed en masse. The murmuration would set off together, causing the lines to clash and trigger an outage. "There're actually three wires between those poles and when they clash together the power will go off for around 10 seconds or so at a time. That's what's been

happening quite frequently," Mr McDonald explained. About 50 local homes had repeatedly been left without electricity for minutes at a time.

Scottish Power now intends to work with RSPB conservationists to investigate ways in which they may safely discourage the starlings from using power lines for their massed evening dance-offs. "It's completely breathtaking to watch, although not something we've ever experienced before," said Mr McDonald. *Guardian*, 17 Dec 2020.

EIGHT LIVES LEFT

A worker at a Russian waste plant rescued a cat moments before it was crushed in a garbage separating machine. The fortunate feline was snatched from the jaws of death at the Gorkomkhoz factory in Ulyanovsk when an eagle-eyed operative snatched a bag away

from the factory's conveyor belt. CCTV footage showed workers sorting through rubbish and opening up plastic bags. The belt was halted and the worker gestured to the cat; while a colleague radioed for help, the first man held the lucky moggy in his arms.

The animal was "chubby, clean and well-groomed, without a scratch", according to company director Igor Perfilyev, who was sure the cat had been someone's pet. "The cruelty of people is surprising," he said, adding: "A little more and the sack with the cat would have gone into the separator. Fortunately, the animal was not hurt. But he is very scared." Unfortunately, Mr Perfilyev explained, cases of pets being thrown into the rubbish are becoming more frequent. This is the third time in two months that Gorkomkhoz employees have found animals while sorting waste. Two red-eared turtles and an African hedgehog had previously been rescued.

Since being pulled from the conveyor belt at the factory 700 miles (1,125km) southeast of Moscow, the cat has gone on to



GORKOMKHOLZ



become a local celebrity and has since been adopted by the Ulyanovsk region's environment ministry and given the honorary position of Deputy Environment Minister. *D.Mail*, 23 Dec; *BBC News*, 25 2020.

YOU WAIT FOR ONE SEAL...

A seal pup was found at a bus stop in Porthleven, Cornwall, by a group of schoolchildren waiting to go to school. Lisa Cadman saw the baby seal as she was dropping her daughter off at the stop, adjacent to the harbour. She called her husband Simon, who, fortuitously, works for Cornwall's Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. Simon arrived at the scene and tried persuading the seal to jump back into the water, without success: "It seemed quite happy and just sat there. It was trying to catch a bus to Godrevy, I think".

However, along with a man from a nearby industrial estate and a member of British Divers Marine Life Rescue, he was able to gently guide the pup into a bag. Staff from the Cornish Seal Sanctuary soon turned up to give the animal a quick health check before releasing it back into the sea. It is thought the seal was one of a pair recently spotted in the harbour during heavy storms. The pup had most likely taken refuge from the waves, leaving the water and crossing the road to the bus stop. *falmouthpacket.co.uk*, 16 Dec; *Metro*, 18 Dec 2020.

SEAL OF DISAPPROVAL

A rare black seal was found in Noordwijk on the Dutch coast, 26 miles (42km) south west of Amsterdam. The young animal was found to be weak, with a small wound on her back and was displaying shortness of breath, so she was taken to the imaginatively named A Seal centre in Stellendam. A spokesperson for the seal rescue centre said it was the first time they had taken in a completely black seal. "It's a grey seal with melanism," they explained. "Due to a genetic deviation the animal makes too much of the dark-coloured pigment melanin, resulting in a dark pelt," hence the seal having been given the name 'Melanie'. A vet who checked her said she was responding well to being fed by tube, and would be kept at the



TOP: The out-of-place Porthleven seal pup. CENTRE: Melanie the melanistic seal. ABOVE: The axe-wielding dog that gave postman Tim Smith a bit of a scare.

seal centre for three months until she had put on weight and was able to eat fish on her own, at which time she will be returned to the sea.

Melanism also occurs in other animals; a flamingo with melanism was spotted in Cyprus in 2015, and a black penguin was filmed in Antarctica in 2019. Three days before Melanie was found, the entire Dutch government had resigned over a child benefits scandal, so her appearance has been read by some Dutch people as a sign – a seal of disapproval, perhaps. *Guardian*, 15 Jan; *nos.nl*, *aseal.nl*, 18 Jan 2021.

MAD AXEDOG

Tim Smith, a USPS postman doing his rounds in rural Williamsburg, Kentucky, had an unusual canine encounter in late 2020, when he came face to face with a pair of intimidating-looking dogs – one of which was wielding a large axe.

"There's a lot of reasons why your mailman might not deliver your packages", he explained on social media, "and this is one of them. I can handle a dog, but not a dog with an axe." He says the dog is actually very friendly and he often sees him carrying around sticks. *wkyt.com*, 18 Dec 2020.

SIDELINES...

BRINGING GOOD CHAIR

University of New Mexico student Conrad Duran and his girlfriend Andrea thought a pair of old dining chairs they had left outside their home had been stolen on Christmas Eve – until they found them returned a few days later, with a fresh coat of paint and new upholstery. Duran found an anonymous note on one of the chairs about doing good for others. "Now they just look absolutely beautiful," he said. *[UPI]* 30 Dec 2020.

WAKE UP CALL

A car driver has been given a warning by police after repeatedly disturbing residents in the Brockhurst and Elson areas of Gosport. The man and his passengers repeatedly shouted "Wakey, wakey!" in the early hours of the morning. Hampshire Police said they had received "many complaints" about the driver of a red Nissan Navara, who was also seen turning off his lights and shouting "You can't call the police because you can't see us!" *BBC News*, 14 Nov 2020.

FONDANT FANCIES

An Egyptian woman was detained after she was accused of baking "indecent" cakes. The tasty treats, topped with fondant icing in the shape of genitalia and underwear, were consumed at an exclusive Cairo sports club hosting a birthday party. The baker was arrested and later released on £234 bail. Dar al-Ifta, a government religious body, warned that such baked goods were forbidden by Islam. *BBC News*, 19 Jan 2021.

"IT'S ALL COMING BACK TO ME NOW"

A Céline Dion fan legally changed his name to hers while watching a TV concert of the 52-year-old legend on Christmas Eve while drinking a magnum of champagne. Céline Dion, 30, née Thomas Dodd, explained how he paid \$122 (£89) for the online registration, then forgot all about it. Some days later he received an envelope containing the official documentation. "Initially, I had to sit down as I couldn't believe it," Mr Dion said. However, "once it sunk in, I signed it straightaway as I bloody love her!" *nypost.com*, 1 Jan 2021.



SIDELINES...

GEORDIE SPUDFOOT

Police launched a “large-scale” search after a dog walker in Gateshead, north east England, sent officers a photograph of what appeared to be a toe poking out of the soil. After carrying out the search in the dark with specialist dogs, police discovered a potato with a mushroom growing next to it, but praised the woman for her “vigilance” and said the call had been made in “good faith”. *BBC News, 8 Jan 2021*

CAT MARAUDER

An armed man in his 50s, dressed in “tactical style camouflage clothing” including a mask and helmet, stormed a Melbourne animal shelter and threatened a worker at gunpoint. He tied her hands with cable ties and demanded to know “where the cats were” before leaving without taking anything. *Australian Associated Press, 12 Jan 2021.*

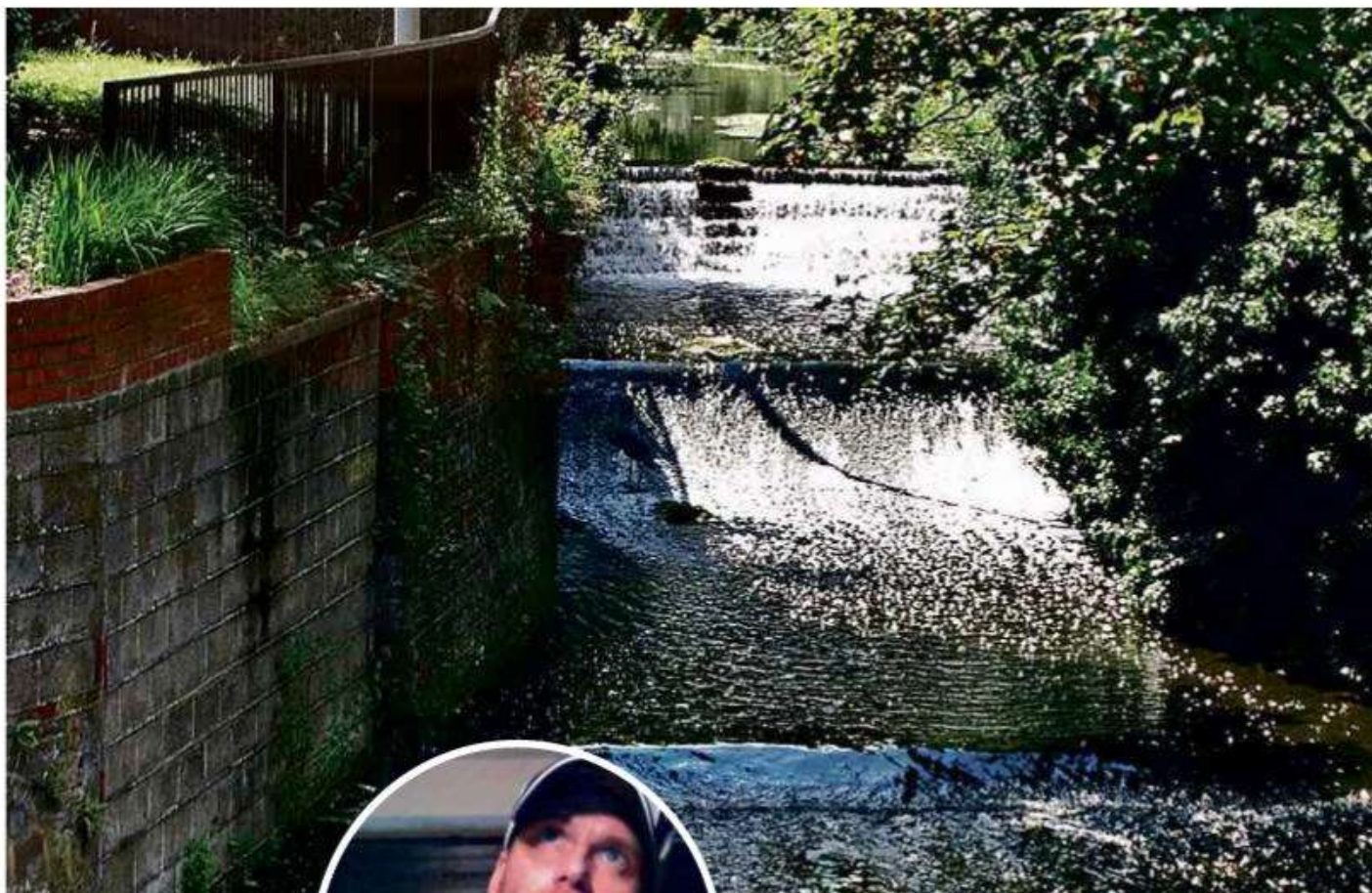
WOODEN SHIPS

Japanese scientists are researching the viability of space satellites made of wood. With space junk becoming an increasing problem, the collaboration between Sumitomo Forestry and Kyoto University hopes to launch the world’s first wooden satellites by 2023, with Sumitomo working on the development of wooden materials highly resistant to temperature changes and sunlight. Such satellites would combust after use without releasing harmful substances into the atmosphere or raining debris onto the ground when they plunge back to Earth. *BBC News, 29 Dec 2020.*



MARTIN ROSS

HOUNSLOW GRAIL | Amateur archæologist locates the Holy Grail in a West London suburb



PAUL TALLING / WWW.LONDONSLOSTRIVERS.COM

Amateur archæologist Barrie-Jon Bower believes he has located the fabled Holy Grail – in a crypt under a river in Hounslow. Unemployed Mr Bower, 40, of Cinderford, Gloucestershire, is convinced that the cup Jesus drank from at the Last Supper has lain hidden in suburban West London for hundreds of years. He claims that the Knights Templar trained on Hounslow Heath before embarking on their Crusades, and says they built a secret crypt to hide seized relics, whose entrance, he believes, was later deliberately concealed near a weir at the man-made Duke of Northumberland’s River.

He has now invested £1,000 to hire specialist geophysical equipment with which to scour the ground once the river is drained, which he hopes will take place in early 2021 if the Environment Agency agrees to divert the river so that its bed can be surveyed. Mr Bower’s preparatory work has made him even more convinced he is on the right track: “Now I’ve been in the water it’s made me more certain. It feels hollow. It feels right. There’s something underneath. I am certain there will be a vault



INSET: Barrie-Jon Bower. TOP: The weir on the Duke of Northumberland’s River (above) near where Mr Bower believes the Grail to be hidden. LEFT: Another Grail contender, this one from Leon in Spain.

beneath the surface, with the Grail inside and other treasures from the Crusades. Why not Hounslow?”

An Environment Agency

spokesman said: “We are willing to review Mr Bower’s request and see if we are able to support him. We have a statutory role to ensure that any works carried out on a Main River are done in a way that does not cause environmental damage or pose a flood risk.” Mr Bower is eager to begin work. “I can’t wait to get started. There are some other reasons as to why I think the Holy Grail is here which I don’t want to reveal. I don’t want rival hunters to get that information. It needs to stay secret. All will be revealed.” *Sun, 18 Dec 2020.*

CESAR MANSO / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



ROBOWOLF

A Japanese town has installed a pair of robotic wolves to scare off bears that have been attacking locals in recent years. Takikawa, on the northern island of Hokkaido, is employing the Monster World robot. It has flashing red eyes and a range of 60 sounds, triggered by a motion sensor, including howls. The “Super Monster Wolf” has also been deployed to drive away wild animals that cause damage to crops, as in the example seen here in Kisarazu, Chiba prefecture. *D.Mail*, 2 Nov 2020. PHOTOS: Toru Yamanaka/AFP via Getty Images.



PAUL DEVEREUX digs up the latest discoveries and ponders the legacy of our Neanderthal genes



ABOVE: Modern humans appear to have enjoyed plenty of sex with Neanderthals.

NEANDERTHAL HELP WITH COVID

In 2002, scuba-diving explorers found a male Palaeolithic jawbone, c.40,000 BC, deep within the Peștera cu Oase ("Cave with Bones"), near Anina, Romania. Hailed as the earliest known vestige of early modern humans in Europe, when scientists analysed its DNA in 2015, they were surprised to find it contained roughly three times the amount of Neanderthal DNA found in today's Europeans. Because the genome contained large stretches of uninterrupted Neanderthal sequences, researchers calculated that the jawbone's owner is likely to have been the product of a modern human-Neanderthal sexual liaison barely 200 years before his birth.

In a recent column (**FT400:14-15**) we remarked that modern humans were having sex rather a lot with various archaic hominids, especially Neanderthals, even into relatively later Palaeolithic times, as this Romanian example testifies. Indeed, one theory is that the Neanderthal genome was diluted by modern human DNA to the point where the Neanderthals, like old soldiers, just faded away – as the Romanian jawbone seems to indicate.

This Neanderthal legacy we all carry in our genes has significant effects on us, good and bad, and more so than we might imagine. "[T]hese unions are thought to have contributed to a range of traits modern humans carry today, from skin tone, hair colour and height to our sleeping patterns, mood and immune systems. Learning about them is already leading to potential treatments for modern diseases, such as drugs that target a Neanderthal gene thought to contribute to severe cases of Covid-19," writes Zaria Gorvett in a BBC

Future feature of 13 January 2021. www.bbc.com/future/article/20210112-heres-what-sex-with-neanderthals-was-like.

AZTEC TAPAS

Tecoaque (aka Zultepec) is a Mesoamerican archaeological site in western Tlaxcala state, central Mexico, close to Calpulalpan. Translated from the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs, its name means "the place where they ate them". This refers to an incident in 1520 when the inhabitants captured a detachment of Spanish soldiers and their extensive retinue – females, children and various others included – and ate them all, even the horses, over a period of months.

The hard-hearted might say that the Spaniards and the others shouldn't have been there anyway, but Conquistador Hernán Cortes naturally didn't see it that way, and ordered Gonzalo de Sandoval to destroy the town in a reprisal attack in early 1521. Excavations suggest the inhabitants of Tecoaque tried to hide the feasted-upon bones (some of which had been worked into trophies), but to no avail. Recent excavations reported by Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History Museum show that those inhabitants who were present when the revenge attack took place were mercilessly butchered. "The placement of the burials suggests these people were fleeing, were massacred and buried hurriedly," the report states. "Women and children who were sheltering inside rooms were mutilated, as evidenced by the discovery of hacked bones on the floors. The temples were burned and the statues were decapitated." This place clearly carries a dark shadow of all-round extreme cruelty. *New Zealand Herald, Guardian, 19 Jan 2021.*

BRINGING HOME THE MEAT

We all too readily think of men being the hunters in ancient hunter-gatherer societies, yet this turns out not to be always the case. A research team from University of California, Davis, analysing 429 archaeological records of burials throughout North and South America dating from between c.14,000 and 8,000 years ago, found evidence of 27 individuals – 11 female, 16 male – buried with big-game hunting tools. The team estimated that 30-50 per cent of big-game hunters living several thousand years ago in the Americas may have been women. This is further supported by a 2018 excavation in Peru in which the remains of a teenage girl who lived around 9,000 years ago was discovered. She was buried alongside "a well-stocked, big-game hunting toolkit" including "stone projectile points for felling large animals, a knife and flakes of rock for removing internal organs, and tools for scraping and tanning hides". *New York Times, 5 Nov 2020. Original paper: Science Advances 4 Nov. 2020. DOI: 10.1126/s.*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEATH THREAT

At 5,000 years old, Caral, in Peru's Supe Valley, over 100 miles (160km) north of Lima, is the oldest city complex yet found in the Americas, and was constructed by an unknown civilisation. Its core area contains 32 monumental structures, of which six are terraced pyramids or "platform mounds", the largest of which is some 60ft (18m) high. Other features include amphitheatres, temples, and dwellings, all apparently constructed in a single phase, indicating sophisticated planning and large-scale organisation. (Many of Caral's architectural features were the forerunners of designs that re-appeared in various Andean and Mesoamerican civilisations millennia later.)

The 200-acre complex, originally dune-smothered, was rediscovered only in 1994 by Peruvian archaeologist Dr Ruth Shady, when she began to excavate it. But squatters claimed, without evidence, that the site's land belonged to them and destroyed parts of the complex. Moreover, they issued death threats to the site's lawyer (it has UNESCO designation) and to Shady and her team via telephone calls and voice messages. "Then they killed our dog as a warning," she says. It wasn't idle stuff, because back in 2003 they actually shot her in the chest! After nine invasions of the site, and repeated requests to the authorities, Caral has now received a modicum of police protection. *Guardian, 2 Jan 2021.*



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

256: COUNTING OUR LOSSES

“It’s like looking for a needle that no-one ever lost in a haystack that never was” – Fort, *Books*, p14

I long ago (FT164:21) surveyed Fort’s published thoughts about antiquity. Relevant here are some snippets from what remains of his autobiographical *Many Parts* (1901, online):

“There were accomplished girls in our kitchen; they spoke Latin fluently, which awes us. But then we picked up a little Latin ourselves” – I’d have been awed, too; be hard to find such scholarly scullionesses these days...

“Learning the Latin names for birds” – on course to become a classic(al) twitcher.

“Forming a polyglot language of French words, Latin words, Arabic words, all kinds of words.”

“Roman history we had not studied in school at all. But we took exams in Roman history at High School” – Did he pass?

Jim Steinmeyer in his Fort biography says his father included in a letter (March 1912) a two-word Latin phrase “intended to tweak the high-school drop-out and supposed novelist.”

Regarding lost classical texts, Fort was interested enough to include (p670) an account of a fraudulent claim to have discovered Livy’s lost 109 books – fully discussed in FT135:24. I recall one of my school classics masters (an Anglican divine) saying he hoped he’d be dead before this happened.

Renaissance scholar Pietro Bembo (1470-1547, pictured above; the typeface is named for him) estimated only one per cent of classical literature survives. Modern speculations fluctuate between higher levels – obviously no possible precision for a lost quantity.

Of Greek literature, incidentally, it’s said that the three million words residue from the 10 million in Galen’s 500 or so books account for nearly 50 per cent.

Given that Migne’s *Patrologia Græca* contains 161 volumes, double-columns, each c.2,000 pages, and his *Patrologia Latina* 221, we may assume a higher proportion for Byzantine and Western Christian output.

Why did X survive and Y not? Ancillary factors include limited runs, thanks to expensive and often scarce writing materials – took many animal hides to produce a single text. Ancient popularity guaranteed nothing. Little remains of Sappho (nicknamed ‘The Tenth Muse’).



By common Roman consent, Lucilius was their greatest satirical poet: ditto. Likewise, the Greek tragic and comic dramas, Roman tragic plays, pioneering Roman epic poet Ennius, and – perhaps most aggravatingly – the many works (prose and poetry) by Cæsar and the emperors.

Destructions of the Alexandrian Library and the sackings of Constantinople in 1204 and 1453 are commonly invoked, albeit the famous story about Caliph Omar’s six-months conflagration (“If these books are true we do not need them; if false we do not want them”) has been doubted ever since Gibbon.

Christian censorship has often been blamed, exaggeratedly so. For easy instance, it’s been held guilty for loss of that section of Tacitus’s *Annals* that would have included his account of the Crucifixion – if he mentioned it. And, why leave in his offensive remarks (*Ann.* bk15 chs43-4) about the sect? How come the ‘dirty’ poems of (e.g.) Catullus and Martial make it through? Or the religion-mocking Lucretius? Over in the East, the loss and mutilation of anti-Christian tracts by Celsus, Porphyry and Julian might look suspicious. Contrariwise, such Byzantine commentators as John Tzetzes took the erotic crudities of Aristophanes in their stride.

Bright side is, things have long kept turning up. There are current high hopes for a large trove to emerge from Herculaneum, already a source for some charred rolls of Greek philosophy. Enhanced laboratory science has facilitated the decipherment of palimpsests, on one of which the plays of Plautus were found rubbed out by a monkish transcriber of Augustine’s commentary on the Psalms. A pity modern techniques were not available to Cardinal Mai, who went blind over the Letters of

imperial tutor Fronto in 1815. Especially after these turned out stylistically well below ancient critical estimation: Fronto, one might say, lost his reputation by being discovered.

Papyri from Egypt have been yielding (mainly Greek) the richest treasures for over a century, a trail blazed by Grenfell and Hunt, their story now immortalised by Tony Harrison’s delightful play (1990) *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. Major discoveries include Aristotle’s *Athenian Constitution* and Greek lyric poet Bacchylides. Many rejoice also over the first finding of a Menander comedy; I felt it was well lost and spoiled a valuable gap.

A rare Latin discovery were nine lines by Roman poet and general Gallus (eventually liquidated by Augustus). Before this, only a single line survived, of which one individual daringly remarked that this was “not typical”.

Since it is estimated at least one million papyri languish unpublished, who knows what treasures lurk? Same is true elsewhere. The Lexicon of Byzantine patriarch-scholar Photios only turned up in 1959 at the Zavorda monastery in Macedonia. What might there be on (say) Mount Athos or in the dustier corners of the Vatican Library? Or, as Fort (p671) surmised in the case of Livy, in secret private collections?

Perhaps some long-overdue reward for Stoic Chrysippus, whose 705 books are all gone, not to mention Didymus (nicknamed ‘Brazen Gut’), of whose 3,500/4,000 productions only fragments remain. Volusius’s *Histories* may be best lost, given Catullus’s description of them as ‘Shitty Sheets’ – or maybe not...?

A few (the big names apart) of my own many desiderata: the memoirs of dictator Sulla and of Nero’s Queen Mum Agrippina; Mark Antony’s pamphlet *On His Own Drunkenness*; emperor Claudius’s treatise on Dice-Playing; Suetonius’s biographies of famous whores; the rest of Petronius’s novel *Satyricon*; the sex manuals of Astyanassa (said to be very ugly, her name translating as “Unable to Inspire Erections”). Elephantis (used as pictorial and verbal Viagra by aging emperor Tiberius), and Philænis (three scrappy fragments found in 1972, so here’s hoping – cf. my piece in *Corolla Londiniensis* 6 (1990), 1-7.

“Ancient wisdom drips in a patter of slimy opinions” – Fort, p396.



A pandemic of nightmares

DAVID HAMBLING finds his sleep interrupted by invisible monsters and other Covid metaphors

Invisible monsters, swarming bugs, and tarantulas coming in through the letterbox: the coronavirus pandemic has brought an avalanche of bad dreams with it. While other scientists have been forced to put their work on hold, dream researchers have enjoyed a rare, if not entirely welcome, opportunity. Looking at how a global disaster has impacted our unconscious life has shed light on the role of dreams, provided evidence on how we process experiences – and also suggests how we can fight back against the nightmares.

One common observation is that people are having, and remembering, more dreams than before the pandemic. A study at France's Lyon Neuroscience Research Center suggests that dream recall has increased by 35 per cent. Several factors contribute to this. One is that increased stress and anxiety mean that people wake up more often during the night, an effect referred to as parasomnia. This gives more chances for dreams, usually forgotten, to be transferred to memory. In addition, the dreams tend to be more vivid, which increases recall.

Deirdre Barrett of the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard is the author of *Pandemic Dreams*, which draws on her work during this period. She suggests the virus appears in dreams in two ways: either literally, where the dreamer thinks they are infected, but more often in metaphorical form. "There was a tarantula that was somehow also Covid-19 coming through the mail slot," one of Barrett's participants reported, noting that they did not even have a mail slot. Another dreamed of millipede-like insects invading the room where she was sleeping. Barrett's subjects reported swarms of flying bees or ants, or even fanged grasshoppers in their pandemic dreams. Barrett suggests that insects have become the definitive dream metaphor for the virus because it is seen as a 'bug'.

"Most people have a strong unconscious association between the word 'bug' and pathogens like viruses and diseases," Denholm Aspy, a psychologist at Adelaide University, notes in an article on the pandemic. This may only apply to English speakers. A study by the researchers at the University of Helsinki in Finland found an increase in nightmares during the pandemic, but without the bugs.

"Our analysis of dream content revealed typical, idiopathic nightmares/bad dreams, e.g., falling, being chased, being late, and the deaths of loved ones comparable to



nightmares reported in a very similarly aged population-representative sample in 2010," states their paper. They did pick up some pandemic-specific nightmare themes such as "personal protective equipment, dystopia, and apocalypse."

The Finnish researchers suggest that dream content is consistent with two theories of dream function: threat simulation and dream continuity. Threat simulation prepares the dreamer for a negative event which they may face, while dream continuity is where the stress or anxiety of waking life is carried over into the dream state but in disguised form. The Finnish study noted examples of classic anxiety dreams appearing in new forms adapted to the current situation. Some dreamers found themselves struggling endlessly or getting lost while trying to get to a hospital or vaccination centre, while others reported going to take a COVID-19 test only to find it was a sit-down, multiple-choice examination for which they were not prepared. The typical anxiety dream of being naked in public was replaced with finding oneself in a supermarket or other crowded place without a mask.

A study from Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte in November similarly found higher rates of dream recall, and also that dreams experienced during the pandemic were described in more detail and contained more anger and sadness than pre-pandemic dreams. The anger and sadness levels related directly to the mental suffering of the individual during Brazil's lockdown. While the

Brazilian dreamers did not report insects, their dreams included more themes of contamination and cleanliness than before. The researchers believe this is consistent with the threat simulation theory.

Barrett suggests that one type of dream experience is unique to the pandemic – being chased by invisible monsters, a reflection of the unseen virus. In some cases dreamers have to cross exposed outdoor areas while being chased or stalked by invisible creatures. In one particularly vivid example, a woman saw the people around her being killed: wounds appeared on their bodies but she could not see the monster causing them. She 'remembered' that the thing could jump to anyone within six feet and realised she was standing too close...

In some cases, the nightmares may resemble those suffered in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Normal or 'idiopathic' nightmares reflect daytime experiences but are not usually repetitive and do not exactly replay events. In contrast, PTSD nightmares relate directly to a traumatic event and often replay it in detail. This may be a failure of threat simulation, where the mind keeps simulating the trauma without resolving it and is caught in a loop. The Finnish researchers found both types of nightmare occurring in the pandemic (see **FT397:8-9** for more on research into this).

We do not need to be passive victims of the nightmare epidemic. Barrett advises her patients to decide how they want the nightmare to be different, then write it down and mentally rehearse a better outcome. This might mean fighting off attackers, or stepping through a door and escaping into another world. The Lyon researchers suggest focusing on the bizarre aspects of the dream and downplaying the negative emotional side.

Aspy teaches lucid dreaming, in which the dreamer is aware they are asleep and can take control of the dream. Many people are taking up new hobbies and pastimes during the pandemic, and Aspy suggests that learning techniques for lucid dreaming would be a worthwhile skill, not just for handling the nightmares of Covid-19 but also afterwards.

Much work in this area is ongoing, recording pandemic dreams from New Zealand to Canada (see **FT402:14**.) There will be many more papers in the coming year. And we are all of us looking forward to the day when we wake up at last.

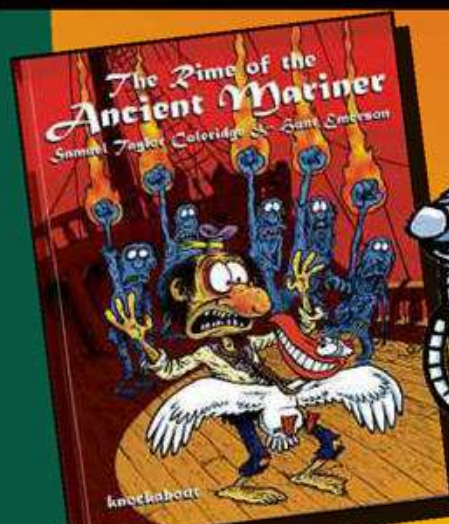
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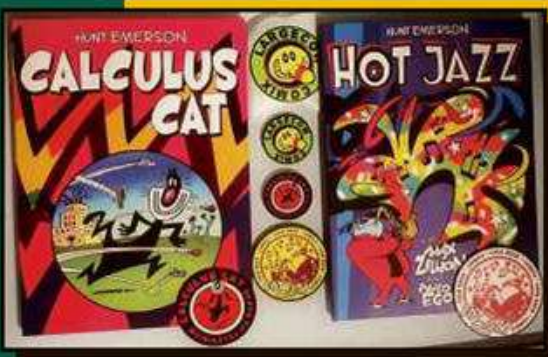
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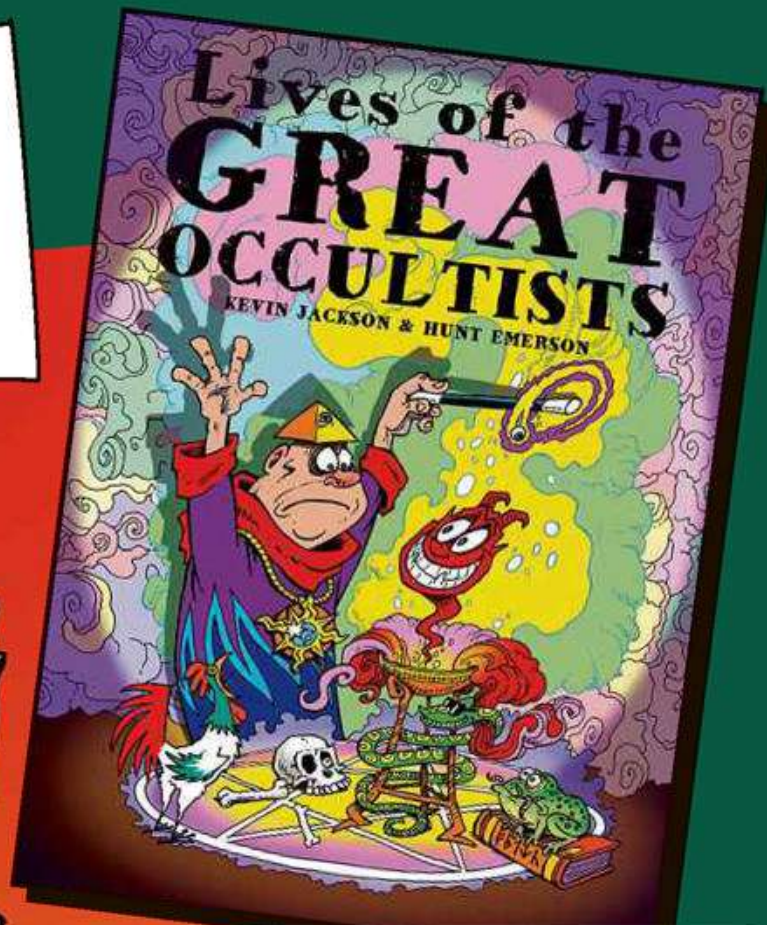
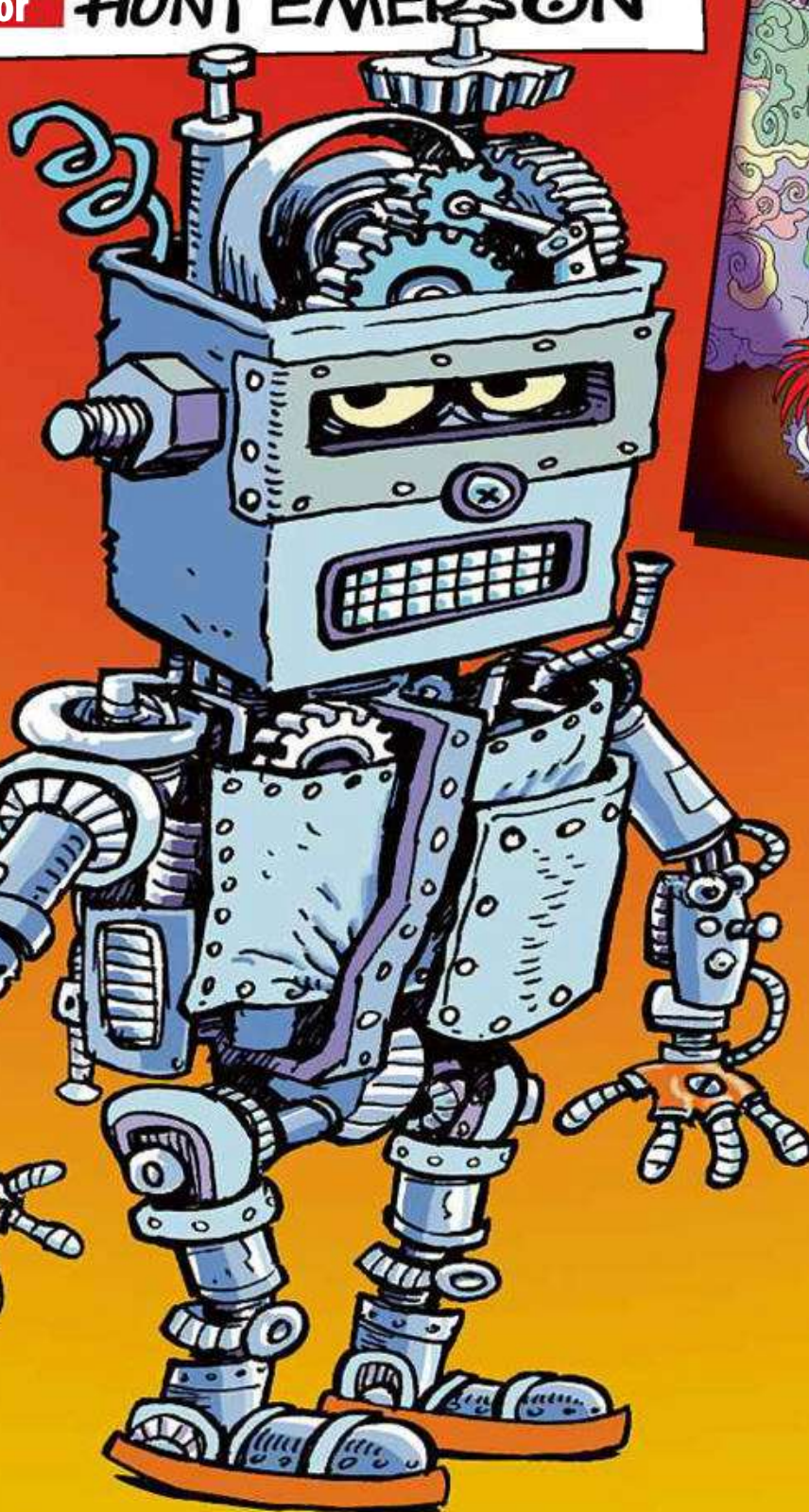
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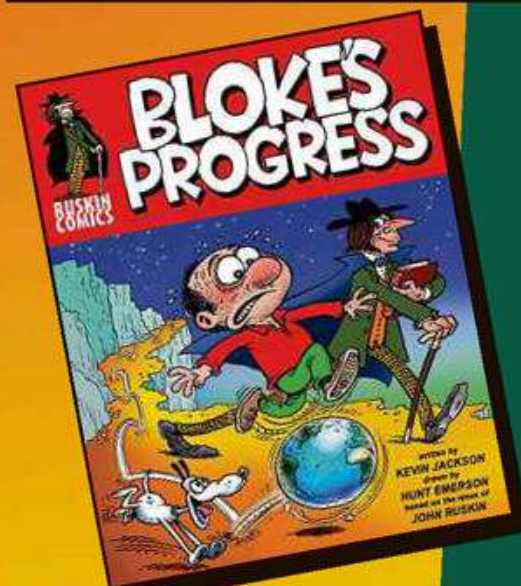
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MIKE COPPOLA / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Lighting lover Amanda Liberty's tattoo of her current paramour. ABOVE RIGHT: Hilaria Baldwin: "Genuinely lovely person... but a fully white girl from Cambridge."

MAD LOVE [FT394:11]



Amanda Liberty, 34, from Leeds, who is engaged to be married to a chandelier she calls Lumiere, has had a tattoo of her beloved in a demonstration of her commitment. The colourful tattoo on her left arm took one and a half hours. Amanda identifies as objectum sexual, that is, she is attracted to objects rather than people. She first realised her unusual sexual orientation when she fell in love with a drum kit at the age of 14. She later went on to become besotted by New York City's Statue of Liberty, changing her surname by deed poll to Liberty.

However, her affections later shifted in favour of the lucky chandelier. "When I first saw Lumiere I knew she was the one for me – it was love at first sight," Amanda explained. "I love Lumiere and want to be with her for the rest of my life." She was apprehensive about the tattooing process beforehand, on account of the

needle, but said it wasn't too nerve-wracking in the end. "I was so pleased to see the final result, it was incredible. Lumiere also thought it was brilliant, she gave me the energy telling me it was great. She tells me when she doesn't like things but she really likes the tattoo."

Amanda first glimpsed her fiancée on eBay. The antique chandelier was made in Germany 91 years ago and is 28in (71cm) wide. Amanda has yet to find a venue for her wedding ceremony. "We don't have anything booked yet," she explained. "I have friends all over the world and I want all of them to be there. She has such a beautiful shape, and I feel really amazing energy coming from her."

Amanda said that: "People just think I'm batty – they don't take the time to get to know me. The term 'fruit loop' has been used numerous times".

Amanda has over 30 chandeliers, none of whom, apparently, are jealous of each other. "They understand that

I love them all for all of their different personalities," she explained. "For example, I love kissing and cuddling Lumiere, but I sleep with Jewel, another chandelier, every night, as she is portable and very nice to cuddle."

She also intends to travel to New York to see her former partner 'Libby', aka the Statue of Liberty, and said they are still firm friends. For more obscure objects of desire, see **FT240:22-23, 357:8-9, 388:6. mirror.co.uk, 23 Nov 2020.**

CHANGING PLACES [FT398:24-25]



Hilaria Baldwin, yoga teacher, 'influencer' and wife of actor Alec Baldwin, has announced that her real

name is Hillary and that she was born in Boston rather than Majorca. The 36-year-old posted a video on Instagram in which she stated: "Yes, I am a white girl." Her post was in response to recent allegations that she has spent years

misrepresenting her heritage and claiming to be Spanish, even to the extent of faking a Spanish accent. A number of videos of her past TV appearances were unearthed as evidence to this effect, and several former classmates came forward to confirm that Hilaria was in fact raised in Boston, Massachusetts. "I went to high school with her," said one. "Genuinely lovely person, I recall, but fully a white girl from Cambridge." Another added: "I went to high school with her. She was perfectly nice and serious about ballroom dancing. Her name was indeed Hillary Hayward-Thomas and she did not have her current accent."

Internet sleuths uncovered details about Hilaria's parents, Dr Kathryn Hayward and David Thomas. Both were university professors in the USA before their retirement to Majorca in 2011. Hilaria has long described her mother as Spanish, but records indicate that Dr Hayward is actually a fourth-generation Massachusetts resident, while



her father's family has even deeper US roots, having lived here since before the American Revolution.

Hilaria is listed as an alumnus of the Cambridge School of Weston in Weston, Massachusetts, notwithstanding her repeated claims to have moved to New York from Spain in 2003 to attend New York University. Her online biography on her agency's website states she was born on Majorca and raised in Boston, without specifying a timeline.

However, following the recent social media furor, she has now clarified that she only spent "some of" her childhood in Spain and "some" of it in Massachusetts, where she was born. She explained that Hilaria is the name she would use in Spain, while Hillary would be used in the US. "Let's be very clear that Europe has a lot of white people in there and my family is white," she said. "Ethnically, I am a mix of many, many, many things. Culturally, I grew up with two cultures so it's really as simple as that." *D.Mail*, 27 Dec 2020.

Design technology teacher Jason Wardill is puzzled that his trade union, the National Education Union (NEU) refers to him as a black man. Mr Wardill, 42, was surprised to be invited by the NEU to a meeting of black teachers last year, as he is of Mediterranean and Jewish heritage. Ever since then he has been trying to stop his union referring incorrectly to his ethnicity, but with no success.

An NEU spokesperson stated that they treated 'black' as a political term, rather than denoting a person of African heritage. Therefore, the term includes "all members who self-identify as black, Asian and any other minority ethnic groups who do not identify themselves as white."

When Mr Wardill registered to join the union and was asked for his ethnicity, he ticked 'mixed other' because, he says, it was "the only option available for me." He explained that although 'Jewish' could



ABOVE: Danish mink were culled and shovelled into mass graves... from which their bloated carcasses have been rising.

be ticked for religion, it wasn't an option for ethnicity, "which leads me to believe the NEU doesn't recognise Jewish as a race. They only appear to recognise it as a religion," he told a newspaper. When he contacted the union to explain he was not black, they informed him that since he did not consider himself white, he had to be registered as black.

"They said they could put an asterisk next to black to show it was political. I said that shouldn't make a difference, because I am not black. It made me feel pretty helpless," he admitted. "BAME [Black, Asian and minority ethnic] would be absolutely fine, as it encompasses everything." He says he feels the NEU's actions are "discriminatory" against other ethnicities and religions. "I don't feel that a black member would necessarily want me down as a black member, and rightly so." *D.Mail*, 27 Dec 2020.

ZOMBIE MINK RISE FROM GRAVE [FT400:8]



Along with the Netherlands, Spain and the state of Utah, the Danish government decided to cull

over 10 million mink after fears that the animals kept in fur farms were vectors of a new strain of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid-19) which, it was feared, could be resistant to the new vaccine. The dead animals were swiftly interred in mass burial pits. Unfortunately, thousands of the minks' bloated carcasses have since begun to rise from their shallow graves.

The phenomenon was first noticed at a burial site located in a military training field last November. "It is an extraordinary situation," said a national police spokesman (police were responsible for the mink culling action). "In connection with the decay, gasses form, which cause the whole thing to expand a little, and then in the worst case they get pushed out of the ground."

A statement from Denmark's environment ministry described the dead mink rising from their graves as a "temporary problem". Naturally, the post-death re-emergence of the furry creatures triggered an outbreak of zombie comparisons on Danish social media. "2020, the year of the zombie mutant killer minks," read one tweet. *D.Telegraph*, 26 Nov 2020.

WOMB RAIDER EXECUTED [FT231:25]



Lisa Montgomery, the only female inmate on federal death row in the US, has been executed by lethal injection at a prison in Terre Haute, Indiana. She was convicted of murder in 2007, having killed a pregnant woman, Bobbie Jo Stinnett, before cutting out and kidnapping her baby in Missouri in 2004. She had befriended the 23-year-old woman online over a shared love of dogs, then drove to her house, overpowered her, strangled her with a piece of rope, and cut the baby out of her womb. Police discovered Montgomery cradling a new-born baby girl she claimed to have given birth to the day before. Her victim bled to death but the baby was safely recovered and returned to her grieving family.

Montgomery is the first female federal inmate to be put to death by the US government in 67 years, and is one of several condemned prisoners to be executed in the last few days of Donald Trump's presidency. *BBC News*, 16 Jan 2021.

For our most recent round-up of womb raider cases, see FT384:22-23.



The man who saw the light

ALAN MURDIE takes a look at the pioneering work of the late Erlendur Haraldsson



ABOVE: Dr Erlendur Haraldsson (1931-2020).

If one were to pick a country in Europe that might claim as many ghosts as England, the prime candidate would be Iceland. In 1980-81 hundreds of Icelanders were asked: "Have you ever in a waking state personally perceived or felt the presence of a deceased person?" as part of a major survey into contemporary ghost experiences. Many hundreds replied, confirming they had.

This pioneering survey was just one of a number of major contributions to the field of apparitions and the fate of consciousness after death, made by the late Dr Erlendur Haraldsson over more than half a century of serious academic research. This was conducted both in Iceland and internationally, including Europe and North America and with fieldwork investigations in India, Sri Lanka and Lebanon.

He placed ghost encounters on a spectrum of experiences of an afterlife and entry into the next world, encompassing crisis apparitions, spontaneous contact with the departed, mediumistic communications, apparent memories

between one life and rebirth, pre-natal memories and especially reincarnation. Rather than look to materialistic explanations, or putting phenomena in discrete categories, he considered experiences as a unified whole, overlapping and reinforcing each other. His own research projects reflected this diversity in a career where work in one area seemed to move almost seamlessly to the next.

A prolific author of articles for newspapers and magazines, as well as scholarly articles and books, his bibliography from the years 1960-2018 includes over 360 articles and books, translated into 14 languages.

Born on 3 November 1931 in Vellir in Seltjarnarnes, he was the son of Anna Elimundardóttir, a housewife, and Haraldur Erlendsson, a labourer. His early interest was astronomy, but after contemplating the depths of space he became interested in philosophy and the mysteries of the mind and existence.

After graduating from the University of Copenhagen in 1954, he travelled widely in the Middle East, encountering Kurdish

rebels in Iraq about whom he wrote a book. Returning to Europe, he studied psychology in West Germany at Freiburg and Munich between 1964 and 1969, completing a doctorate. In between academic work he became a spokesman for Kurdish rebels from 1964 to 1969 and was vice-president of the International Kurdistan Society (1965-1970). Travelling to the United States, he gravitated to psi research and met and worked with some leading American researchers.

In 1971, Haraldsson joined American parapsychologist Dr Karlis Osis on a study of deathbed visions. They set forth on four expeditions to India to collect cases, building upon work already undertaken by Osis, who surveyed medical professionals in the USA in the early 1960s.

For those keen to see a ghost or spirit of the dead, it appears we all have one good chance in life. It occurs right at the end of life when an apparition of a deceased person may appear, seemingly to fetch the dying person. Osis had already found this in replies to a questionnaire sent out to 285 physicians and 355 nurses in

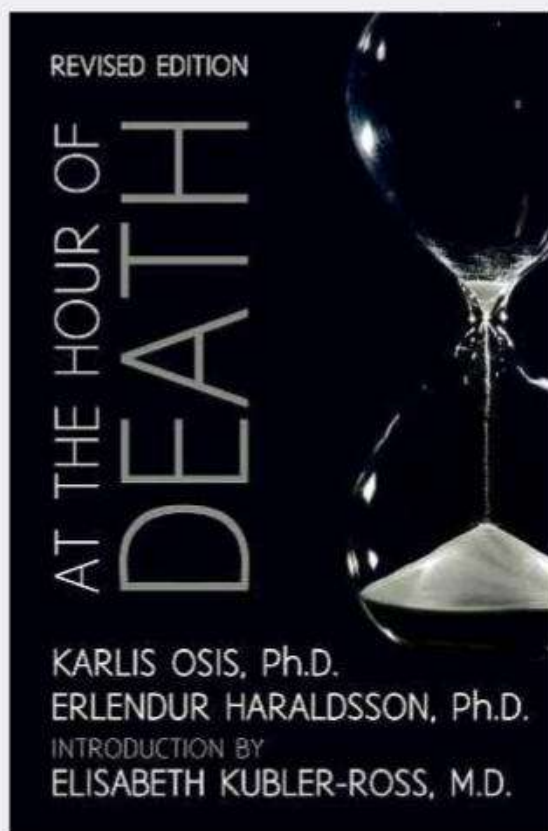


ABOVE LEFT: Erlendur Haraldsson with Mustafa Barzani in Kurdistan in 1964. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dr Haraldsson with Dr Karlis Osis (right) in 1973 on one of their visits to India to research deathbed visions. The two co-authored a book on the subject, *At the Hour of Our Death* (below), first published in 1977.

1961, who reported having witnessed over 35,000 deaths of patients between them. They reported some 40 per cent of dying patients having visions or hallucinations, the overwhelming preponderance seeing the apparitions of dead people, usually deceased close relatives of the dying patient. Typically, the experience had a calming effect, and the apparition was interpreted as a spirit coming to greet the patient and guide them into the afterlife. These results matched what Osis and Haraldsson discovered in India, showing cross-cultural parallels with those in North America. Their Indian study revealed that of 10 per cent of Indian patients who were conscious in the hour before death, the majority reported experiencing an apparition or visions to medics in attendance (see K Osis and E Haraldsson in *At the Hour of Death*, 1997, third edition).

During two of their research trips, they met the famous and charismatic Sathya Sai Baba, who died on 24 April 2011 and who was India's most famous, and controversial, swami or holy man, one of the most enigmatic and remarkable religious figures of the 20th century. Sai Baba attracted two million followers, including many who vouched for his miraculous powers, as he appeared to perform many of the miracles of Christ, including a 'transfiguration experience' in which witnesses attested to Sai Baba appearing on a hillside radiating "an intense light that shone from him and blinded the group", one of a repertoire of paranormal manifestations. Chief among these were apparent abilities in materialising various tokens of devotion, such as amulets, rings and pendants and producing 'vibhuti' or 'holy' ash from the air in prodigious quantities. Haraldsson

Haraldsson admitted some claims about the mystic Sai Baba "were truly mind-boggling"



admitted some claims about the mystic "were truly mind-boggling". Their own encounters with him, and the interviews with witnesses, led to two joint papers, and later a book by Haraldsson, *Miracles Are My Visiting Cards* (1987). By the time it appeared, the phenomena had been going on for about 40 years; if they had been fraudulent, Haraldsson argued, it would be

expected that at least some associates of Sai Baba, who would be unavoidably required to assist in fraud, would have exposed it, either in confessions or inadvertent revelations. Yet this had not occurred. Even persons formerly close to Sai Baba who later became negative about him for one reason or another never even hinted at deceit concerning physical phenomena.

Inevitably, allegations arose when in 1992 an Indian newspaper claimed to hold film evidence showing Sai Baba using trickery when apparently materialising a gold watch he gave to the prime minister.

Opponents of Sai Baba drooled over the exposure, with the story spreading into the Western media (*Independent*, 2 Mar 1994), which claimed the film showed "tawdry sleight-of-hand".

However, anomalous psychologist and expert on deception Dr Richard Wiseman joined Haraldsson in announcing the footage did not fit this simplistic narrative. The film was poor quality, revealing only enough detail to conclude that trickery was a possibility, but not definitely proved. (*Deception and Self-Deception and Investigating Psychics* by Richard Wiseman, 1997).

Experiences in India cemented Haraldsson's interest in apparitions and afterlife studies. Following a stint as a psychologist at the now apparently defunct American Society for Psychical Research in New York between 1972 and 1974, Haraldsson took up a post of assistant professor of psychology at the University of Iceland in 1974, progressing to associate professor in 1978 and attaining full professorship in 1984. This provided a base for his landmark survey



GHOSTWATCH

into ghost experiences in modern Iceland. In 1980-81 Haraldsson launched a wide-ranging population survey of apparitional experiences and encounters with the deceased in the country.

A short one-page questionnaire and a self-addressed envelope were distributed by five popular magazines: two for fishermen, sailors, and the fishing industry (covering 5,800 subscribers); two for people interested in Spiritualism, spirituality, Theosophy, and new religious movements (3,000 subscribers); and a magazine that circulated in rural districts. Readers were asked if they had ever seen an apparition, heard the voice of a deceased person, sensed a smell, felt a touch, or in some other way felt the presence of a dead person.

Where the initial answer to the question was yes, respondents were asked to supply a name, address, and phone contact for follow-up interviews. Receiving around 700 questionnaires with positive responses, some 64% of the participants came from the greater Reykjavik area, 21% from towns across Iceland, and 15% from rural areas, reflecting the approximate population concentrations in the country.

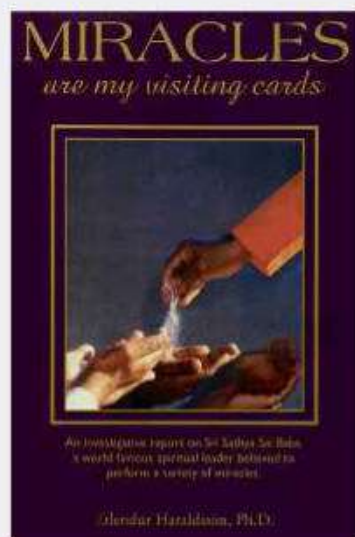
After excluding dreams and visits to mediums, Haraldsson and colleagues were left with 337 ghost experiences leading to recorded telephone interviews conducted between 1980 and 1981 and continuing up to 1986.

Some 307 responses contained the date and place of the experience, the senses engaged, how the deceased appeared and disappeared, the lighting conditions, how real the occurrence seemed, and other details. If respondents had more than one experience of the dead, they were asked which one seemed most impressive. Where the apparition was recognised or identified, efforts were made to trace details from official records, including the sex, age at death, cause of death and relationship to the witness.

As in UK surveys, visual apparitions predominated, followed by auditory experiences. Other sensory stimuli such as odours, touches and tastes were rarer. Many Icelandic reports could be lifted straight from case reports gathered in Great Britain recording encounters with life-like human forms:

I had recently started working in a factory when one day I saw a man walking at the further end of the machine at which I was working. He walked up to a wall near which the machine was placed and back. I went

to see who the man was but found no one. When I told my co-workers about this experience and described the man to them, they were sure that this had been a ghost that some others had also seen. It was the former director of the company who had committed suicide.



With cases of recognised figures, Haraldsson studied official death records, verifying the deceased person's gender, to establish the cause of death. With these findings, he suggested a large proportion of ghost sightings are of males, especially those suffering violent ends and accidents. This might be attributed to men living in earlier decades being more likely than their female counterparts to be involved in dangerous situations, such as war, the

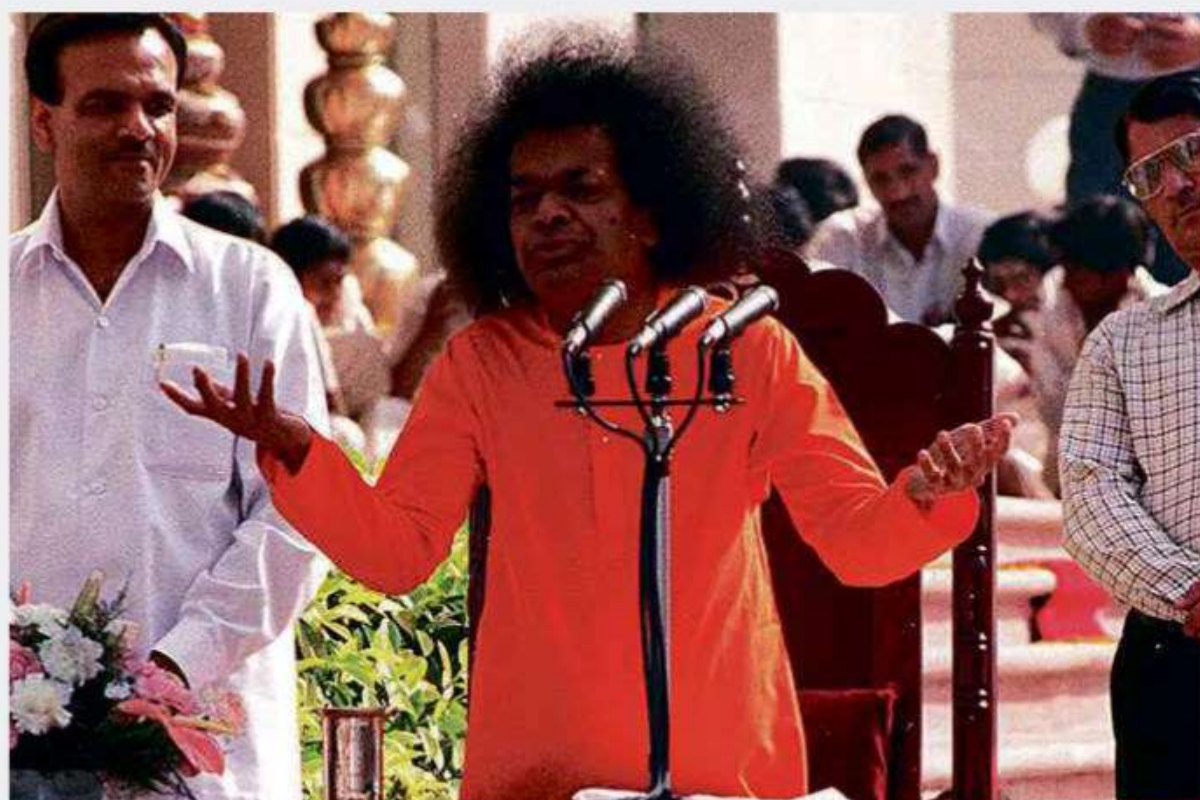
fishing industry or mining. The same pattern has been found in retrospective studies of the classic *Phantasms of the Living* (1886). It also matches the folklore of the world, where apparitions are typically of those dying suddenly or by violence, and the 'troubled spirit' hypothesis of popular tradition.

He further compared this Icelandic survey with data obtained by wider national surveys in Great Britain, Sweden and the United States, as well as findings of a multinational survey by Gallup and affiliated companies across most countries of Western Europe, showing interesting national differences and a widespread belief in the existence of psychic phenomena. Viewed in total, in Iceland, Great Britain and the USA over half of respondents report a paranormal

experience. ('Gallup Representative National Surveys of Psychic Phenomena: Iceland, Great Britain, Sweden, USA and Gallup's Multinational Survey', *Journal of the SPR* 53, 1985, pp.145-58). A later study, part of the European Values Survey, 2011 revealed 63.4% of Icelanders declare an acceptance of survival of bodily death, with about one third considering themselves as having a personal experience involving some kind of contact with the deceased.

From Iceland's own past, working with researcher LR Gissurarson, Haraldsson helped retrieve for posterity the history of native psychic Indridi Indridason, known as a 'middleman' representing "an interface of rare quality between the two realms". Indridason had a short career between 1905 and 1909, but ranks as one of the outstanding physical mediums of all time. He produced almost every effect ever observed in the séance room, on a par with the celebrated mediums DD Home and Eusapia Palladino. He produced raps, cold breezes, 'transcendental' music, spoke in voices including foreign languages (so-called 'xenoglossy') and levitated objects. Reports from observers also recount extraordinary effects: 'disappearance' of the medium's left arm, strange lights, the apparition of 'Emil Jensen' (his spirit guide) in a pillar of light, the materialisation of objects and on one occasion the appearance outside the séance room of a phantom 'monster-like animal', part calf, part horse.

Further records kept by the Icelandic Experimental Society concerning the séances conducted came to light in 2000, in the form of minute books rediscovered after half a century, detailing protocols and the conditions imposed. Haraldsson



ABOVE: Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba inaugurates the Sai International Centre in March 1999. Dr Haraldsson's meetings with him led to the 1987 book *Miracles Are My Visiting Cards* (above).

TEKEE TANWAR / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

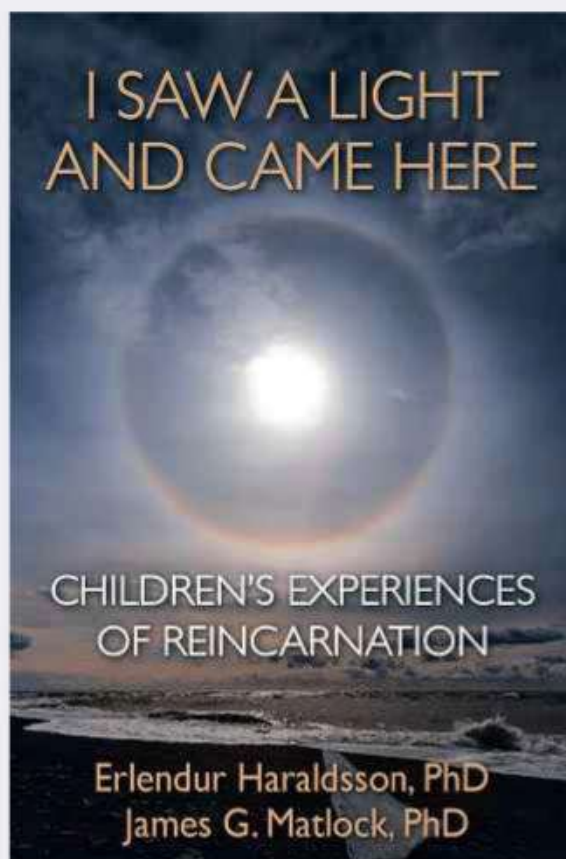


concluded: “In the mediumship of Indridi Indridason there is not only strong evidence for paranormal physical phenomena, but in addition we find an exceptional number of different phenomena that have been interpreted as pointing towards human survival of bodily death.” (See LR Gissurarson, & E Haraldsson, (1989) ‘The Icelandic medium Indridi Indridason’ in *Proceedings of the SPR*, 57, pp.54-148 published as a book in 2015 by White Crow)

All this work led to the inevitable question: To what or where do we go after we die and what is the fate of the individual soul or the spirit?

In searching for answers, Haraldsson looked into reincarnation. His interest in past life memories dated from 1969 and his year at Virginia University where he met Ian Stevenson, the founder of modern reincarnation studies commencing with his study *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (1966) and eventually expanded into numerous and voluminous case studies.

In 1973 Haraldsson was requested by Stevenson to study a rebirth case from Iceland (cases from Europe and North America are comparatively rare). This later developed into a national survey of reincarnation across Iceland in 1974, repeated in 2006. Again, he engaged in further international forays, following up past life memories found among children in Sri Lanka and Lebanon. These suggested personality traits from past lives might continue, based upon statements made by young children who recalled a previous existence. Again, he found children who died a violent death in the previous life they remembered predominated and were more likely to display symptoms consistent with



Purnima spoke of her memories at a very early age and spoke persistently about them

post-traumatic stress disorder than those displaying no such memories.

Haraldsson later wrote a book, *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation* (2017), its title inspired by a statement by Purnima Ekanayake, a Sri Lankan girl who told her parents that she saw a light while disembodied before being reborn. Her body carried birthmarks, linked to a previous incarnation as a man killed in a traffic accident. Purnima started to speak of her memories at a very early age and spoke persistently about them.

Although a cross-gender case, Purnima did not act in a masculine manner, as had sometimes been identified in other cases described by Stevenson. Haraldsson found children typically forget these memories when they attain the age of six, but Purnima still spoke freely of her previous life at the age of 10.

In some cases, further suggestive evidence was accumulated. Another, investigated with Tissa Jayawardane from Sri Lanka, was the case of Chatura Buddika Karunaratne, born on 20 April 1989 in the rural area of Metiyagane in the Kurunagala district of Sri Lanka. At the age of three Chatura made several statements regarding a previous life, including where he had lived and how he died while travelling in a truck through a forest. The boy associated two

LEFT: Purnima Ekanayake was one of the childhood reincarnation subjects studied by Dr Haraldsson; his book *I Saw the Light and Came Here* takes its title from a statement of hers.

birthmarks with his claimed memories. His statements were recorded and published, leading to an identification with a deceased person found in the area, whose circumstances corresponded to the boy's statements.

Following publicity, MP Martin, a retired farmer and mason in Henegedara, came forward, believing the profile fitted his son MP Dayananda, who had joined the army in August 1985 and died on 18 April 1986, as a result of injuries suffered in a bomb blast. The birthmarks found below the ear and on the neck of Chatura corresponded to the location of the injuries. ('Birthmarks and claims of previous-life memories 2: The Case of Chatura Karunaratne' in *Journal of the SPR*, vol.64, 2000, pp.82-92). Haraldsson's co-worker Tissa Jayawardane continues this research (see www.newstrails.com/lives-reborn-sri-lankan-researcher-trying-prove-continuity-life-death/2017).

Dr Erlendur Haraldsson died at Reykjavik on the evening of 22 November 2020 at the age of 89. He is survived by his widow Bjorg Jakobsdottir, a Middle Eastern scholar, and two children, Harald, a psychiatrist, and Anna Elisabeta, an engineer.

I had the pleasure of meeting Erlendur Haraldsson on a number of occasions at conferences and events between 2005 and 2017 and always found him pleasant and mercurial despite his focus on death and survival. Displaying the energy and enthusiasm of a much younger man, he had an easy and infectious humour, at the same time remaining profoundly dedicated to his research and moved by many aspects of it.

My own impressions bear out what he told interviewer Rosemarie Pilkington about his career in 2011, recorded in *Men and Women of Parapsychology, Personal Reflections* (2013). Regarding advice for those wishing to adopt psychical research as a career he arguably – and sensibly – suggested that one should get a grounding in another science or discipline first before embarking upon psi studies. For him it had led to a life full of fascination and learning.

He stated: “I cannot think of anything I would like to have done differently... I have had a lot of good luck, came to know the right people at the right time... I enjoyed all of it and am in retrospect happy for all these opportunities that came my way or I created.” Altogether, it seemed he felt fulfilled by the course his life had taken and having followed what he believed to be his destiny.

spurious transients

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KARL SHUKER nominates his two most exciting zoological finds publicly revealed in 2020

THIRD COELACANTH SPECIES?

One of the greatest zoological discoveries in modern times occurred on 22 December 1938, when a living coelacanth was captured off South Africa. Until that momentous day, this distinctive lineage of lobe-finned fishes was known to science only from ancient fossils that even pre-dated those of the last dinosaurs, being more than 65 million years old. Consequently, the South African revelation that somehow, against all the odds, coelacanths had survived ichthyologically incognito right into the present day was a zoological sensation. This newly discovered modern-day species, subsequently found to exist primarily around the Comoro islands, was formally dubbed *Latimeria chalumnae* in 1939. Moreover, history repeated itself less than 60 years later when in 1997 a second living coelacanth species was discovered, this time existing in waters off the Indonesian island of Sulawesi (Celebes), which was formally dubbed *L. menadoensis* in 1999. (Incidentally, it's worth noting that although hitherto unknown to zoologists, both species had long been familiar to the fishing communities in their respective regions, who even had local names for them.)

What may be a third such discovery was publicly announced in 2020. On 1 July 2018, a coelacanth specimen was fished up from a depth of 300m (980ft) off West Papua, New Guinea, but had been largely eaten before scientists could examine it. However, tissue samples obtained from its surviving remains were subjected to DNA analysis by an international team of researchers. The specimen, ostensibly belonging to the Indonesian species *L. menadoensis* and captured only 752km (467 miles) east of Sulawesi, was found to display a molecular divergence from other Indonesian specimens of 1.8%. By comparison, the molecular divergence present among specimens of *L. chalumnae* is only 0.04%, whereas even the molecular divergence between the whole of *L. chalumnae* and the whole of *L. menadoensis* (other than this Papuan specimen) is only 4.8%.

Translated into chronological terms, this indicates that whatever population

is represented by the Papuan specimen diverged from all other Indonesian populations around 13 million years ago, with the entire *L. menadoensis* and *L. chalumnae* species diverging from each other 30-40 million years ago. Consequently, in their official *Scientific Reports* paper of 13 January 2020 documenting their findings, updated in March, the team did not rule out the possibility that the Papuan specimen represents a second, taxonomically discrete species of Indonesian coelacanth. They state: "We hypothesize that several populations of coelacanths are likely to live further east of the present capture location, with potentially a new species that remains to be described". However, they also fully acknowledged that more Papuan specimens will need to be studied in order to determine whether this is indeed the case. We await further developments with great interest!

www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-57042-1 13 Jan; <https://reefbuilders.com/2020/01/21/coelacanth/>, 21 Jan 2020.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

In 1913, 107 years ago, a specimen of a langur monkey from Mount Popa, an extinct volcano in the central region of what was then Burma, now Myanmar, was collected for London's Natural History Museum (NHM). It was traditionally deemed to be a specimen of Phayre's langur *Trachypithecus phayrei*, an arboreal species named after Sir Arthur Purves Phayre, the first Commissioner of British Burma – but until recently, it had never been examined in detail. Although having a wide

distribution across southeastern Asia, it is not common anywhere, and is usually split into two separate subspecies. However, when an international team of researchers examined the NHM specimen morphologically and genetically, they discovered sufficient differences to warrant its reclassification as a representative of a scientifically undescribed species.

Now known as the Popa langur, and represented only by a handful of small populations in the wild (as a result of which it is categorised as Critically Endangered by the IUCN), it was officially dubbed *Trachypithecus popa* in November 2020. Moreover, this same study revealed that the two known subspecies of *T. phayrei* should also be deemed valid, discrete species in their own right. Mount Popa's langur is distinguished from its relatives not only by genetic differences but also by way of small yet consistent fur coloration characteristics, even allowing for the marked variation that langurs so commonly display. As confirmed during 2018 by filming this reclusive monkey in the wild for the very first time, these characteristics include distinctive broad white rings fully encircling its eyes, a wider white muzzle, and blackness on its lower arms extending slightly above its elbows. In addition, its skull is more elongated and its molars are larger. Weighing about 8kg (18lb) and sporting long slender limbs like most langurs, the Popa langur is one of the largest new species of Old World monkey to have been described in recent times.

www.zoores.ac.cn/en/article/doi/10.24272/j.issn.2095-8137.2020.254, 11 Nov; www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2020/november/new-species-of-monkey-is-already-critically-endangered.html 11 Nov; www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-54894681 11 Nov 2020.



TOP RIGHT: An Indonesian coelacanth. ABOVE: A Popa langur, with its distinctive eye rings.

THE C NSPIRASPHERE

When the *New York Times* recycles the same story with different details, is it a conspiracy theory? **NOEL ROONEY** wonders what we should make of such MSM confabulation.

WHACK-A-MOLE TROPES

It's a characteristic of classic conspiracy theories that certain elements of them can be recycled to fit new theories as they arise: think crisis actors, baby-eating Satanists, or FEMA coffin stores. One could say they are perennial tropes of the conspiracy grand narrative, the equivalent of a refrain in a biblical psalm, or a chorus in a Tik-Tok sea shanty.

So it's amusing to observe the same thing happening in the mainstream news cycle. Amusing, and instructive; a dispassionate observer might turn to thinking that either the conspiracy meme bug has infected the unwitting media, or that media outlets are explicitly indulging in conspiracism.

A little over a year ago, largely buried under the burgeoning story of coronavirus, the *New York Times*, a paper known for its cosily close relationship with intelligence services, published a story suggesting that the Russian government was paying a bounty to terrorists and insurgents for killing US military personnel in Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere. So far, so CIA-generated propaganda; the story was repeated, evidence-free, in a number of other media outlets, and a few politicians were rolled out to express their shock and anger.

And then the story died. Except that, a few months later, it resurfaced, this time with Iran playing the part of evil sponsor. Same story, same sources, same route to the mainstream. And a few months after that, up it popped again, and this time the sinister paymasters were the Chinese (why not? They were already in the cross-hairs for foisting the bat plague on an unsuspecting world). And just for continuity's sake, in



We are all, to some extent, conspiracy theorists now

the run-up to Joe Not Trump's inauguration, the story reappeared with the Russians back in the central casting frame.

The right wing of the Conspirasphere reacted fairly predictably to the story; when it named the Russians and the Iranians, they saw it for what it was, and laughed it off as a government-inspired conspiracy theory. But when the Chinese were nominated, they leapt on the story as yet more evidence that the Chinese were out to destroy America. The left wing got excited when the Russians and Iranians were the bad guys – particularly the Russians, as they are the default bogey man for all Democrat worries – and giggled at the idea of the Chinese doing something so outlandish.

The story never got the traction its anonymous authors desired, which in part explains why it kept reappearing wearing a different face mask, but here's the thing: when this happens in the

Conspirasphere, we recognise it for what it is – the rinse and repeat clichés of a narrative that, at its core, never changes, and which never lets lack of evidence get in the way of a good blood-libel – but when the mainstream does it, and by extension, government does it, what do we call it? How do we characterise an action that, in conspiracist terms, is part of the confabulating infrastructure of a narrative that superficially morphs to suit the bias du jour?

Two possibilities spring to mind. First, the steady creep of conspiracy theory into the mainstream, and the steady expansion of the Overton Window it seems to have enabled, has opened a conduit for the more loosely hinged members of the intelligence community; because so much of what passes for news (the news used to contain information, didn't it? Or is that just a mournful rendering of the Mandela Effect on my part?) is now just someone or other putting it out there, and others picking up on the meme, it has become OK for intelligence mavericks to concoct a juicy – but clearly meat-free – story and watch it surf the media wave. In this case we could characterise it as a strange form of public entertainment, and a tacit recognition that we are all, to some extent, conspiracy theorists now.

The second, and more sobering, inference is that it has always been thus. The various centres of power, and their willing acolytes in the media, have habitually circulated false stories in the mainstream, to nudge public opinion at critical times (such as an election where the Establishment has a very definite dog in the race), or to shore up the demonisation of a perceived enemy when

they are just not acting wickedly enough to maintain the façade; and these stories bear all the hallmarks of a classic conspiracy theory. And here, we find ourselves in a grey zone, a strange demi-monde where the rabbit holes are shrouded in a miasma of uncertainty, and the entrances are stamped with an official seal.

And why does this matter? It matters because the generalist, psychologised view of conspiracy theory, the view that regularly seeps into public consciousness, tends towards the idea that the theory itself is largely irrelevant; it's the mindset of the recipient that tells you what you are looking at. As well as removing agency from the theory as a phenomenon in its own right, this tendency has the effect of cordoning off certain categories of conspiracy theory from the domain of investigation; a story emanating from official sources, even one as blatantly fictitious as the Russian/Iranian/Chinese bounty myth, can't be a conspiracy theory because it doesn't demonstrate the glib psychopathology that animates the academic industry. Or if it does, no one is talking about it.

As a result, the generation of conspiracy theory is compartmentalised to the extent that much of it is not treated as conspiracy theory at all. The further we voyage into the uncharted waters of the post-truth world, the more precarious such distinctions may prove to be; and that is not an edifying prospect.

SOURCES: www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/politics/russia-afghanistan-bounties.html; <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/17/politics/iran-taliban-bounties-us-intelligence/index.html>; [www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/china-accused-offering-bounties-afghan-nonstate-](https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/china-accused-offering-bounties-afghan-nonstate)



CARRY ON DOCTOR

Fake teenage doctor is rumbled, while Dr Alladin gets all creepy and Dr Khan is tricked into buying an 'Alladin's lamp'



FAR LEFT: Adnan Khurram – very busy, but not a doctor. LEFT: The hypnotic Dr Alladin. ABOVE: Dr Khan's decidedly unmagical lamp.

DOCTOR DO-A-LOT

Adnan Khurram, 19, successfully posed as a doctor from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), roaming around hospitals in a lab coat and stethoscope for five months.

He participated in doctors' social events, a marathon, and protests against the Indian government's National Medical Commission (NMC) bill. "He was very active in all our meetings," recalled Dr Harjit Singh Bhatti, president of the Resident Doctors' Association (RDA). "We welcomed it because most doctors and MBBS students here are usually too tired after study and shifts to participate in volunteer activity."

Khurram also allegedly used his fake RDA credentials to meet VIPs. "He forced his way in to meet Congress president Rahul Gandhi and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, who came to AIIMS for treatment recently," said Dr Bhatti, who explained that Khurram's participation in so many activities raised suspicion among other doctors. "We were surprised that he could make it to all the events at AIIMS. He claimed to be a junior resident, who usually end up with 18-20-hour shifts. He used to hang out near the coffee shop or the doctors' hostel every evening. We started wondering how he had so much time."

The RDA decided to examine records of all medical students, since no one was sure what

course he was pursuing or which department he was in. "He said different things to different people," said Dr Bhatti. When Khurram's name could not be found in any official records, the police were called in and he was arrested. Police said they had been surprised by his knowledge of medicines and familiarity with senior doctors. "It's still not clear why he posed as a doctor, as he has been frequently changing his statement," said police spokesman Romil Baaniya: "In one statement he said he committed his crime to help get preferential medical treatment for an ailing family member. But at other times he claims he was posing as a doctor simply because he likes spending time with doctors." *hindustantimes.com*, 17 Apr 2018; *Private Eye*, 9 Oct 2020.

LECHEROUS LECTURER

Psychology lecturer Dr Waseem Alladin was struck off after attempting to seduce a student by hypnotising her. The mature student told a tribunal that Dr Alladin had stroked her face with a rose, praised her "serpent power" that made her "irresistible to men", and told her she was his soulmate whom he had been waiting 600 years to be reunited with. When the student spurned his advances, he complained that she "wasn't submitting totally to him" and warned her that if she didn't "step up and give him what he needed", he had five other students lined up who

would. Alladin coerced her into undergoing hypnosis and took photos of her while hypnotised.

The tribunal heard how a group of female students at the unnamed but top UK university who called themselves 'The Apprentice Club' met with Alladin for informal meetings. One of these students told how he had massaged her head after "staring into her eyes" in order to hypnotise her. He recorded the session on his phone, saying that she "glowed and smiled" and had asked what she would do if he tried to kidnap her.

Another student testified to what she described as a "weird experience" with the lecturer, during which she believed he had tried to hypnotise her. She felt he had persuaded her to send him a "full body" photograph of her in order that she might be "healed".

As the group of students began talking to each other about their lecturer's bizarre behaviour, Alladin attempted to drive a wedge between them, telling the mature student that his spirit guide had advised him not to trust a younger student who "had a darkness within her". Meanwhile, he warned the younger student to beware of the mature student since "he had yet to work her out".

Throughout the hearing, Dr Alladin insisted there had been no sexual intent behind his actions. "It has been claimed that I was sucking her toes, I was putting my thumb in her ears. That is revolting. It's not my

behaviour." However, the tribunal concluded that his behaviour had been undertaken "with sexual gratification in mind" amounting to professional misconduct. He was struck off with immediate effect. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 16 Nov 2020.

LAMP SCAM

Speaking of Aladdin, an Indian doctor complained to police after being swindled by a pair of conmen who tricked him into buying an "Aladdin's lamp" for seven million rupees (£72,000). The pair had also conjured up a fake *djinn* as part of the scam. Dr Laeek Khan, from India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh approached police officers after he realised the lamp did not have any magical powers. Senior policeman Amit Rai suggested that Dr Khan had got off lightly: "The cheats had struck a deal for much more, but the doctor had [only] paid about 7m rupees".

Dr Khan described how one of the men had pretended to be an occultist and apparently conjured a *djinn* from the lamp. But when the doctor asked if he could touch the *djinn* or take the lamp home, the men refused, saying it might cause him harm.

Two men have been arrested. "They have also cheated other families using the same modus operandi," said Rai. "The total amount of money involved runs into several million rupees." *BBC News*, 31 Oct; *Guardian*, 1 Nov 2020.

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the weirdest news from Europe, including a mystery hum and a German polt



ABOVE LEFT: The Santa Claus Village near Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland. **ABOVE RIGHT:** a female ‘Christkind’ deals with the mail at Engelskirchen’s special post office.

WHERE DOES SANTA LIVE?

This comes a little late, I’m afraid. Christmas is supposed to be a celebration of peace on Earth, and there is, as my newspaper source says, a merciless fight among the northern nations of Europe as to where Santa Claus has his home. Hollywood says that Santa lives at the North Pole. However, there are no reindeer that far north. The Scandinavians (mainly) agree he lives in their far north, in Lapland.

Many Finns say that Joulupukki (a married form of Santa) has his home near Korvatunuri close to the frontier with Russia. Others place Santa’s home about 300km (186 miles) from there in a village named Rovaniemi where a theme park was opened in 1998. The park has 500 illuminated reindeer and the people of the town have copyrighted it as “the official hometown of Santa Claus”. It is open throughout the seasons, so that kids can sit on Santa’s

lap each and every day of the year. Some citizens even sought EU recognition of this fact from Brussels; however, only Estonia supported the move.

The Danes know that Santa, or the Julemand, dwells in Greenland in a small log cabin in a tiny place called Uummannaq. The cabin was built for a Danish TV show in 1989, and there is even a towering 5m (16ft) tall Santa’s post box on the island.

For the Swedes, Jultomte has his house at Mora in the mid-Swedish region of Dalarna (where runes remained in use until the beginning of the 20th century). The region also has a Santa-themed park – Tometeland, or Santa’s Country.

Things are a bit different in Iceland. There, the good people have 13 Santas or Christmas trolls (I have also heard my Finnish friends speak of Christmas trolls) who live in the mountains around Dimmuborgir. These are rather mischievous, stealing food and other stuff. However, they

have their good side and put presents into the shoes of well-behaved children in the 13 days before Christmas.

Undeterred, Germans believe that it is the “Christkind” (Christ Child) who bring presents to German kids. He lives in Engelskirchen (in North Rhine-Westphalia – it translates as Angel’s Church) where every year a special post office (which even has its own post code) employs extra workers to deal with the avalanche of Christmas wish-lists sent by children. In 2009, it dealt with 160,000 letters. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 24 Dec 2020.

FALLING FISH

It is good to see that most fortune phenomenon of all, the fish fall, happening in Europe again, this time in Italy.

Famous Lake Garda cooking blogger Liliana Bazoli, from Gargnano, was covering her lemons in the garden with her husband Plinio on 10 December 2020 “when suddenly I heard

a thud on the lawn less than a couple of metres away. I turned around and saw a whitefish weighing over half a kilo in the grass, a female with eggs. I immediately looked to see if the cat was nearby, but I realised by looking up that one of the seagulls squawking above our heads had clumsily lost the fish it had just caught from the lake. I left the fish on the wall in the hope that the seagull could come and take it back; we’ll see if it will.” *BresciaOggi*, 11 Dec 2020.

SINKHOLES

While the sinkholes of Siberia are still hotly debated, similar craters opened to the north and south of the continent around the beginning of 2021. On the night of 30 December 2020, a landslide in Ask, some 40km (25 miles) northwest of Oslo, destroyed many houses. The ground just sank below the village, 700 inhabitants had to be evacuated, several people were missing, and one was found dead two days later. The



earth had caved in over an area of roughly 700 by 300 yards (640 by 275m). The cause of the catastrophe was not known at the time of writing, but there had been heavy rains in the previous few days. At the same time, there was a violent earthquake in Croatia.

On 8 January, a large sinkhole opened beneath the parking lot at a hospital in Naples, Italy. The giant crater was 20m (70ft) deep. Luckily, no one was injured, but firefighters filmed smoke coming out of the hole and electricity in the hospital went off. The cause of the crater might have been an explosion. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 31 Dec 2020; 2 Jan 2021; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 Jan 2021.

MISTREATED MEDIAEVAL MONKEY

Archæologists have unearthed the skeleton of a monkey during building work for a multi-storey car park in Basle, Switzerland. At first they thought the well-preserved bones, some 570 years old, were those of a child. But closer analysis showed they were those of a Barbary ape or macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*). The archæologists believe the monkey had been kept as a pet (they were quite popular in the Middle Ages). But the bones also told the story of the damaging mistreatment the poor animal had suffered: the vertebræ were deformed, proving the monkey had been on a chain all its life, and fractures revealed it had often been severely beaten. The animal's teeth had been filed down and rounded so that it could not bite.

Documents indicate the owner of the unfortunate animal may have been the scholar Heinrich von Beinhelm, one of the lecturers at Basel University. Barbara Tuchman has shown, in her book *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, that monkeys were common pets back then, and they are often depicted in the stonework of old castles, such as the one



in Dhaun, Germany. <https://netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de/mein-wort-zum-sonntag-22-november-2020/>.

TEA SHOP POLT

In 55-year-old Angelika Holaschke's tea shop at the fruit market in Augsburg, Bavaria, strange things are said to happen, and on an almost regular basis.

When Angelika opens the shop in the morning she inevitably finds the doormat some distance from where it was left in the evening, while the lids of tea caddies are found to have been opened mysteriously – and this has been going on for 14 years. Says Ms Holaschke: "It is very strange – since I have moved in, the doormat wanders

around, sometimes 10cm [4in], sometimes 30cm [12in], and sometimes it even crawls up the counter." It is a heavy mat, with rubber to hold it to the floor.

A friend who works one floor up, Susanne Wosnitzka, has become interested in the strange goings-on and says she tried to identify some natural cause for the unruly mat's behaviour. "We can rule out vibrations from a tram as the cause, as there are none." There are also no construction sites nearby which could cause tremors. "We also hopped around on it, and even then the doormat didn't move," says Holaschke. In addition to the errant doormat, tea containers are found open in the morning and tealeaves lie scattered

LEFT: The bones of a Barbary macaque found in Basel. **BELOW LEFT:** A pet monkey shown in one of the late 15th century 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestries now in the Musée de Cluny, Paris.

about. Holaschke is also unable to find an explanation for this: "I always close the lids tightly, otherwise the tea will lose its aroma," she says. She doesn't believe any of her employees are to blame: "There are only five people who have a key to the shop, and we can rule them all out."

She thinks that unruly spirits are the cause of the strange goings-on. Wosnitzka is a local historian and found that the Eisenhut Inn, an old building now replaced by the house where the current haunting is happening, had more than its share of tragedies in the past 150 years. In 1842, a guest died in bed; later a maid fell into the pit under the cellar and suffocated. In the Middle Ages, the fruit market was occupied by a monastery, and "skeletons keep coming to light during construction work, including that of a woman who was pregnant when she died." Wosnitzka asks: "Was it a nun who had to die because of an unwanted pregnancy? Are there restless souls haunting the tea shop?"

What would Holaschke do if one of the ghosts appeared to her, a reporter wanted to know. "I'm not worried about that. I have excellent calming tea in my store," she said. *merkur.de*, 15 Dec 2020.

SKY SOUNDS

It has all gone quiet when it comes to the mysterious 'sky trumpets' reported all over Europe in recent years, but the strange hum that many ear-witnesses around the globe have heard is still with us. In November 2020, people in Bad Honnef, Bonn, Germany, complained about mysterious and persistent humming noises that reporters and police were unable to explain. *WDR news*, 2 Nov 2020.

NECROLOG

This month, we mark the passings of an innovative SF and fantasy writer and publisher and of an Oxford geneticist who famously analysed 'Yeti' hair samples



STORM CONSTANTINE

The death in January of writer and publisher Storm Constantine was a great shock to the fantasy, science fiction and esoteric community, and to her many friends and fans. Storm had an innate sensibility for myth and magic and how stories should be told. She published 30 novels, and her non-fiction books included titles on Ancient Egyptian magic and goddesses. In 2000 she co-authored *Silverheart* with Michael Moorcock, who said Storm possessed "outstanding power and originality."

She was nominated for several prestigious awards in the SF and fantasy genres. She contributed to many journals, including *Visionary Tongue*, which she co-founded, and other multimedia projects. Some might be surprised that she wrote a collection of stories based around the popular online game phenomenon *World of Warcraft*. She contributed to the album sleeves of *Earth*

Inferno and *Revelations* of the band Fields of the Nephilim, and their lead singer Carl McCoy likewise contributed art to the cover of her acclaimed 1991 novel *Hermitech*, a favourite with the emerging Chaos Magic scene in the UK. She also warmly encouraged and received fan-fiction based on her work.

Disillusioned with mainstream publishing, Storm founded Immanion Press in 2003 with her husband Jim. They published her own books and those of other authors, by whom Storm is fondly remembered for always giving encouragement and good advice for budding writing careers. Immanion provided a launchpad for original woman magical writers, too, and kept in print the works of the late Tanith Lee, who had been a friend and one of Storm's own early inspirations.

Her best-known books, full of astonishingly original world-building and character creation, are the Grigori Trilogy, which

emerged from her close friendship with the writer Andrew Collins and his investigations into the Nephilim angels and ancient myth, and her ever-popular Wraeththu novels. These weave a rich and sensual re-telling of the vampire story in a future world. Collins said of the latter, that Storm "created an entire mythical realm featuring beautiful flesh and blood angel-like beings; the books pushed the accepted boundaries for their time in Storm's unique portrayal of androgyny, intersex, and gender identity." Neil Gaiman described her as a "myth-making Gothic Queen, whose lush tales are compulsive reading. Her stories are poetic, involving, delightful and depraved."

In 1998, Storm co-authored, with Debbie Benstead, *The Inward Revolution*, a self-development book way beyond its time and ahead of anything else in the category then or now. It draws on modern Pagan systems and techniques, and also on the teachings of Wilhelm Reich and Krishnamurti, to break harmful early life conditioning. Storm's enduring love of the Pagan goddesses and of cats saw her co-author *Sekhmet and Bast: Eyes of Ra* with Elouise Coquio in 1999, and with Collins in 2019 she produced *She: Primal Visions of the Dark Goddess*.

Storm Constantine's legacy is a treasure-chest of books for future readers to discover. Her loved ones and friends will remember her vibrant creativity, warmth, generosity and hospitality, and how her down-to-earth attitude kept her connected to the most dazzling worlds of the imagination. They would concur with Neil Gaiman who said "she was always funny and sensible and nice."

Storm Constantine, novelist, publisher and esoteric writer, born Stafford, 12 Oct 1956; died Stafford, 14 Jan 2021, aged 64.
Caroline Wise

BRYAN SYKES

Human geneticist Bryan Sykes was educated at Eltham College, received his BSc from the University of Liverpool, his PhD from the University of Bristol, and his DSc from the University of Oxford. He pioneered the analysis of inherited conditions such as brittle bone disease, published the first report on retrieving DNA from ancient bone (*Nature*, 1989), furthered our understanding of what DNA can reveal about the human past and topics such as the colonisation of Polynesia and the fate of the Neanderthals. He also headed the genetic survey of Yeti and Bigfoot DNA. Based on this study, he was named 'Cryptozoologist of the Year' in 2013; independently, Daniel Perez's *Bigfoot Times* named Dr Sykes its 'Bigfooter of the Year'.

Since the time of Edmund Hillary's ill-managed 1960 examination of Yeti evidence in Nepal, there had been a need for a serious re-inspection of all the evidence for the wide variety of Yeti material from a number of types of Yetis. Into this void, around 2011, stepped Dr Sykes. He told cryptozoology researchers that he would work with them, if they would work with him. The geneticist had thrown down the challenge. Many were cautious, but eventually agreed to share hair samples with Sykes and his Oxford University-based study.

Globe-trotting with a crew from Channel 4/National Geographic to record the historically significant work he was doing, Sykes ended 2013 by revealing the DNA findings regarding Yeti, Almas (and, to a lesser extent, Bigfoot; see **FT320:21, 324:21, 326:23**). He had put in the effort scientifically, but the media would misunderstand what Sykes discovered, and even what he said about his Yeti samples. The results from just two samples of hair (one from Ladakh, the



other from Bhutan) indicated he had identified a giant bear-like brown Yeti – and some Yeti researchers had previously suggested that a large, unknown bear accounted for one of the three kinds of Yeti.

The news reports claimed that the Abominable Snowman mystery had been solved and ran headlines screaming: “Yeti is a Polar Bear” (sometimes with pictures of white polar bears). Both were incorrect conclusions on the part of the media, who often seemed more of a hindrance than a help in sharing Sykes’s discoveries.

Sykes’s involvement with mysterious Yeti hairs predated the 2013 findings. On 2 April 2001, *New Scientist* reported: “Hairs found in a Bhutan forest could be those of the legendary Yeti, say makers of a TV documentary.” The hairs were found in a cedar tree marked by odd scratches and said by the team’s guide to be a Yeti’s lair. When the team returned to Britain, the hairs were handed for analysis to Sykes, who said: “It’s not a human, it’s not a bear, nor anything else that we’ve so far been able to identify... We’ve never encountered any DNA that we couldn’t recognise before, but then, we weren’t looking for the Yeti.” The other hair samples came from pigs and other creatures, but this one was mystifying: “We don’t know what it is; it’s behaving most peculiarly,” said Sykes.

His own books covered and corrected the inaccurate coverage of his findings. One chapter in his book *Bigfoot, the Yeti and the Last Neanderthal* is entitled “The Guru” and it’s about my work and that of the International Cryptozoology Museum. I was honoured; noting that Sykes’s son had done the chapter header drawing of a coelacanth, the logo species of the International Cryptozoology Museum, I was doubly honoured.

Bryan Sykes, geneticist and author, born London, 9 September 1947; died Edinburgh, 10 December 2020, aged 73.
Loren Coleman



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FLYING BODIES

A witness sees a UFO racing across the sky. Any UFO investigator worth his or her salt will first check the sighting against natural explanations: Venus, a harvest moon, shooting stars... I realise, as I start preparing Fairy Census 2 – we are getting close, if anyone can contribute sightings or experiences – that fairy investigators need to do the same thing.

For the fairy investigator, though, the problem is not heavenly but flying bodies, especially birds and insects. The suspicion that we might be dealing with birds or insects in fairy sightings is particularly strong when the fairy is described as being small and when contact is fleeting.

An example from Norfolk (Fairy Census, section 88). “I was sitting and just staring at the surrounding nature when a body flitted by about two metres from my head... It looked like a very large butterfly but with a long tail which had some sort of detail at the end. It moved in a series of ‘U’ shaped movements.” The witness was a fairy-sceptic, but could find no British insect that would match. I’m struck by the lack of colour in the description: I wonder about a small bird seen at an unusual angle; note the flight pattern.

Another correspondent recently wrote to describe a walk in a Cornish wood. The correspondent came upon: “a tiny upright

humanoid, with wings, flying about like Tinkerbell”. The walker had a jolt. But careful observations allowed an identification: “Its rear legs hung down directly below it, and some combination of colour markings and angles made it look like it had boots on these legs. Two smaller front legs were held forward like arms, the head was held up with long

antennæ, and the fluttering wings were at right angles.” My correspondent suggested a gasteruptiid: I suspect, having seen a picture, that he is right.

Chris Woodyard reminds me of “those stories of people thinking they’ve seen mystery big cats that either morph into or are later shown to be ordinary dogs.” She wonders whether “the same thing happens with fairies/ insects/dragonflies; does seeing certain vibrations or movements trip a switch in the brain where you think you’re seeing dragonflies, but

suddenly ‘realise’ they’re fairies?” Perhaps! I simply do not have the knowledge of insects to make identifications: I had to look up ‘gasteruptiid’ (it’s a type of wasp). As the son of an ornithologist, I just about limp by with birds. There are, though, several descriptions of ‘fairies’ that were possibly glimpsed birds or insects. If anyone out there has a background in entomology and ornithology then I’d love to pass these on and see if any can be gently removed from the realm of faerie.

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu’s Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

“I WAS SITTING
AND STARING AT
NATURE WHEN
A BODY FLITTED
BY ABOUT TWO
METRES FROM MY
HEAD”



Silvery ships from the stars...

JENNY RANGLES ponders a spate of *Close Encounters*-related cases and the nature of UFO hoaxes

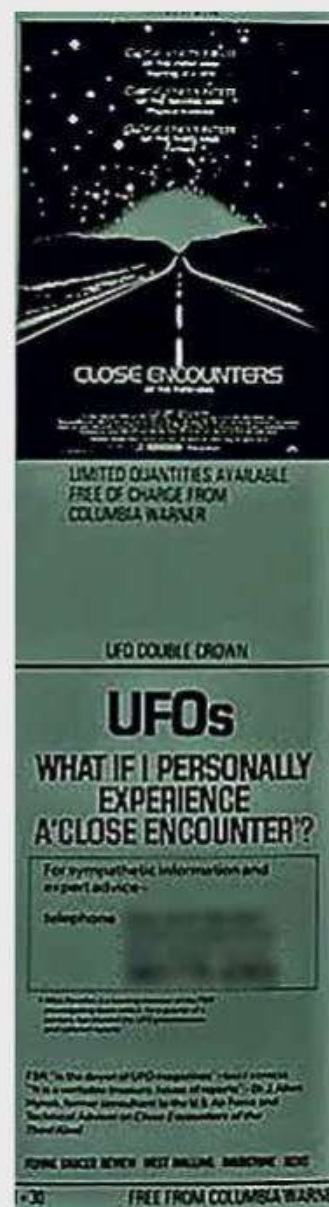
I did a lot of TV shows over a 30-year period, promoting a stream of books for my publishers. But there was only one for which I happily crossed an ocean in midwinter. That voyage was for an Irish TV show and took place in the middle of a Winter Atlantic storm. My plane home was forced into an emergency landing and diversion to two separate airports – neither of which were where I was actually headed. However, I never regretted making the trip, because on the chat show with me was a singer-songwriter who the producer had sold to me as “someone you will never have heard of, but he is good”. In fact, I was a fan, so my answer was an instant ‘yes’.

That singer-songwriter was Al Stewart – probably best known for his hit ‘The Year of the Cat’ – a folksy guitarist who paints musical pictures of people he has known or grand historical events. A quote from his song ‘Carol’ gives this column its title. The song is not really about aliens, more about the singer’s exasperation with the lady in question as he asks “them” to “take me anywhere”; as visitors from beyond, they will surely “understand”.

In a few words, this reveals much about our subject. If UFOs did not exist, we would by now have invented them, because they provide a missing piece in the soul of humanity. Our desire for someone with superior knowledge to rescue us from chaos has a long pedigree: UFOs and aliens are a modern retelling of necessary myths complete with a space age God. I think of aliens as an intergalactic cavalry, where the ‘reality’ matters less than their perceived existence. Like Al Stewart, we peer optimistically skyward, waiting for them to arrive, because surely someone must be wiser than us and can prevent our self-destruction with the wave of a magic wand.

Aliens exist because it is unimaginable that they do *not* exist – that the Universe is in the sole hands of humanity, duffers like us who make a pig’s ear out of everything we touch and have not so far destroyed our tiny home due to luck rather than judgement.

My thoughts were engaged by the recent debates in these pages on the subject of a ‘Silvery Man from the stars’ (or more accurately Risley, Cheshire). Glen Vaudrey’s article (FT397:36-41) relates how he uncovered what might be the truth behind a ‘long-forgotten’ 43-year-old case in which a seemingly alien entity had arrived not in a silvery ship but via a grassy slope outside the UK Atomic Energy plant to spook a driver on his way home.



ABOVE: The marketing of Spielberg’s film used real-life UFO cases and encouraged people to report their own ‘close encounters’: the flyer on the right carried Jenny’s home address and phone number!

Our desire for someone with superior knowledge to rescue us has a long pedigree

I do not intend to revisit that case here, and the author may have indeed resolved it; but the suggestion that the story quickly disappeared is inaccurate, as Peter Hough and I discussed it in depth in our book *Death by Supernatural Causes?* a decade after it happened. By then, tragically, the witness had died from cancer, with speculation that the silvery man who “blew up” his car radio might somehow have triggered that disease. This extrapolation was inevitable, so any prankster going public would have faced a rather grim prospect.

It is easy, due to happenstance, for pranks to get out of control like this. But in the Risley case some context has been missed. There was good reason why the *Warrington Guardian* ran the numerous UFO stories Glen Vaudrey found in those old editions. The Risley episode occurred when the best-known UFO movie of all time – Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* – had just opened in UK cinemas. Aliens were big news, and I was helping the film company with the movie’s promotion.

Glen’s article on the Risley ‘hoax’ infers that UFO enthusiasts tend, by default, to seek aliens. Indeed, many do; but as I was heavily involved via my friendship with Dr J Allen Hynek, who inspired the film, and posters with my contact details were on display in many cinemas in March 1978, I was a prime candidate to have indirectly triggered a hoax myself.

This social context adds more nuance to the ‘hoax’ argument, but it also misses the

role ufologists play, one that can make them innocent pawns in a wider game. A hoax here was always the most likely explanation, given that no UFO was seen and the Spielberg movie had primed the nation to be alert to alien incursions. So the idea that the Risley silver man was not from the stars was a likely option from the start, especially as I was helping a national newspaper uncover cases just like it. Indeed, one that was reported to that campaign was not dissimilar and involved a beachcombing witness coming across a similar lone 'spaceman' collecting 'specimens'.

The Risley witness was later confronted with a UKAE fireman who stepped in front of him in his silvery suit so investigators could judge the witness's response. "Nothing like it," was his instant reply when asked if this was what he had seen.

Anyone who investigates UFOs has to take into account both the wider context and the fact that a case may not have happened exactly as reported. The stranger the story, the more that possibility comes to the fore. Hoaxes are not common, but they happen, and the reasons why should be considered.

However, there are many other motives beyond a movie inspiration and silvery men from the stars are often curiously a part of them. In the 1970s, probably because space travel was new and exciting, silver suits seemed to be a recurring motif: astronauts wore them, so obviously aliens would do the same. Indeed, only five weeks before the Silver Man of Risley appeared, there was another case just 20 miles away in Cheshire where similarly clad entities were seen. This case found its way to my then-fiancé, who acted as an intermediary with the 'witnesses', although neither he nor I were ever allowed to meet them. The story made the papers via an old girlfriend who had come across it by chance.

This ended up as another long-running bit of UFO folklore because the press repeated it around the world in several garbled versions: I watched the tale develop, like a snowball rolling downhill and picking up anything it met. Through repeated misreporting, it had soon turned into quite a different story.

So a UFO legend was created, in part by a young reporter who knew of my partner's UFO interests. This case report reveals another possible trigger for a hoax – but a story can escalate out of control in many ways.

Around the same time, a third case also involving a man in a silvery suit staring at passing traffic occurred on a remote road on the Cheshire borders. For all I know, one serial trickster using *Close Encounters*-related media interest in UFOs was on a hoaxing spree and was behind all these cases. At the time, we just followed the leads; here, our best guess was a roadside worker spraying weedkiller while wearing a protective suit just as a hapless passer-by chanced upon him. This fits the witness testimony better than an actual alien, with no apparent spacecraft, who just happened to be standing beside a country road.

What you believe when it comes to these situations is often predicated on two things.



ABOVE: The site of the UKAE plant where Ken Edwards saw the Risley 'silver man' in 1978.

The first is whether you have all the facts or are missing key data that might transform the story. The second is what you actually want to believe – because most of us would instinctively regard a real alien as more exciting than a ufological Sherlock Holmes joining up disparate clues and cracking the mystery in mundane terms.

Hoaxing is much more complex than just a bloke in a firesuit having a laugh. There can be multiple reasons for it – indeed, said 'alien' might not even know that a witness believed that is what they were. It could all be down to happenstance, and only strange from the perspective of the observer, not the one being observed.

Cheshire in those days certainly had 50 shades of Greys, and here is one more way a 'hoax' can occur. On this occasion, there was no doubt that the plan was to use perception of an alien in an innocent but mischievous way. Peter and I stumbled upon the plan because we investigated a worker from a company in mid-Cheshire who saw a man in a silver suit. The worker was on a night shift, guarding a site by the Mersey. The 'intruder' vanished. So far, so familiar.

For various reasons, staff at the company were aware that I wrote books about UFOs. The nation was in an economic recession and the firm created a plan to invent a 'convincing' close encounter, then call me in to investigate and use the resulting publicity to promote a marketing campaign with a product linked to UFOs. Thankfully, I became suspicious early on and they quickly abandoned the plan – but it made me realise that as a UFO investigator one can be viewed by some parties as a potential business asset. What, really, is the difference between helping a national newspaper market alien yarns and being the pawn of a struggling business that had scented a PR opportunity? The bottom line is that if aliens did not exist somebody would want them to and might even conspire to bring them to life by harnessing the human desire to believe.

As UFO investigators we rarely consider how others see the phenomena we investigate. We regard what we do as a noble pursuit of truth, but this is not the only path. I doubt that any of the companies and

individuals which backed Spielberg's movie did so because they wanted to show the world that aliens are real: they were doing it because it was a good idea that could prove popular and make a lot of money.

Irrespective of the motives for involvement of real UFO researchers like Allen Hynek, who helped make the movie credible, or others like myself promoting it for the media, the film has the power to affect belief, even if it isn't actually 'real'.

There is a good reason why we still see TV shows, books and blockbuster movies about aliens, even though the buzz surrounding spaceflight has long since passed; indeed, not just aliens but the fantasy stuff of TV epics like *Game of Thrones* – dragons, wizards and so on. These are all things that are, in some sense, believed in as 'real' within our collective consciousness, because on some level most of us want them to exist: we keep recreating them to provide ourselves with reassurance that they just might. We yearn for these older, wiser beings who have access to magic that we do not possess; we yearn for that divine essence that can stop us falling into the abyss. And if we need to give that belief a helping hand we will – often without realising it.

Aliens are 'real', whether they exist or not – and hoaxes are in some ways the most real thing about them, because those involved in their creation or their perpetuation are part of that age-old creative process. Hoaxes are generated out of necessity; if we cannot actually turn to real magic for our salvation, we can at least create an imaginary version of what the frustratingly elusive aliens would do if they were here.

Whether any aliens *have* ever visited us is almost beside the point. We have imagined they do, either as elves and demons, or Vulcans and Klingons, or greys and reptilians. All are as 'real' as each other, just not in the sense that we usually use the word. This process happens without most of those involved being consciously aware that they are not spectators sitting on the sidelines trying to figure out who is winning the match, but are actually in the game.

We should pay more attention to hoaxes. They tell us more than we realise.

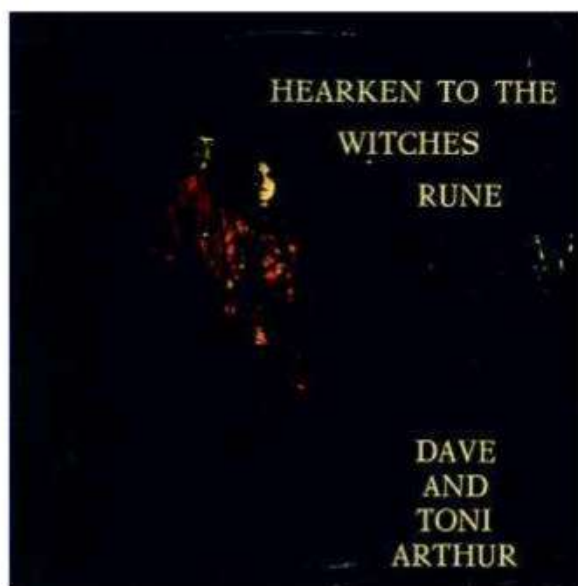
CASTING THE RUNES

In 1970, Dave and Toni Arthur recorded *Hearken to the Witches Rune*, an occult-themed LP of folk songs. Fifty years on, the album has gained cult status, but its gestation and legacy are just as extraordinary as the music itself, stretching from the rituals of “King of the Witches” Alex Sanders to children’s TV favourites *Play School* and *Play Away*. Dave and Toni reminisce with **BOB FISCHER**.

“I was interested in magic and witchcraft and things like that from an early age,” says Dave Arthur. “Twelve or so. Dennis Wheatley’s novels... I read those. *The Devil Rides Out*, *To the Devil a Daughter*, *The Ka of Gifford Hillary*. Occult novels fascinated me when I was a kid. And then I discovered the Atlantis Bookshop, just by the British Museum, which was the occult bookshop in London at the time. All the magicians and occultists of the time used to hang out there, and I was part of that scene. It was one of those old-fashioned bookshops, with piles of books all over the floor, all dusty and dark.”

We’re discussing the background to *Hearken to the Witches Rune*, an album of starkly beautiful folk music recorded by Dave and his then-wife Toni in 1970. Fifty years on, it’s an LP that maintains a devoted cult following among enthusiasts of folklore, occultism and esoteric music alike. Its eight tracks are riddled with tales of fairies, shapeshifting, spells and Elfin Queens, all recorded on a Revox A77 reel-to-reel tape recorder in a first-floor Camden Town flat. Its subsequent scarcity has only compounded the record’s mystique: it has been resolutely unavailable since the 1970s. There is no pristine digital remaster, no CD box set or deluxe 21st century vinyl, and abandon hope all ye seeking iTunes downloads or Spotify streams. The vintage crackles of increasingly elusive eBay copies and DIY Youtube rips have themselves become part of the album’s own extraordinary story.

“I had totally forgotten his absolute predilection for Dennis Wheatley!” exclaims Toni. I speak with them both, one after the other on the same afternoon, via crackling Skype connections at the height of Covid-19 lockdown. Both are fast-talking, funny and fascinating conversationalists. I’m keen to discover where this mutual interest in the supernatural arose, and what part – if any – the genuinely uncanny played in their



ITS SUBSEQUENT SCARCITY HAS ONLY COMPOUNDED THE RECORD'S MYSTIQUE

respective upbringings.

“I’ve had a lot of strange experiences,” continues Toni. “A lot of stuff that could be construed as magic. When Dave and I got together, I’d had a very ordinary background, but I’d had some very extraordinary things happen. I’ll give you one instance: I had my first piano lesson when I was nine. Mum took me round to see Miss Adams... she was my schoolteacher, but she also taught music. I went there, and had my first lesson.

“And I got to school the next day, and in those days every classroom had a piano in it. Miss Adams said ‘Now, Antoinette had her first lesson yesterday. And what did you learn? Come to the piano, and you can play it.’ And it was a tiny, five-note little thing. I

LEFT: The front sleeve of *Hearken to the Witches Rune*, shot in the Arthurs’ garden, and lit by the car headlights of producer Bill Leader.

said ‘That’s what we did... and I’m going to do another thing later, and another thing later, and at the end I’m going to play this...’

“And then I played the last piece in the book, reading from the music.”

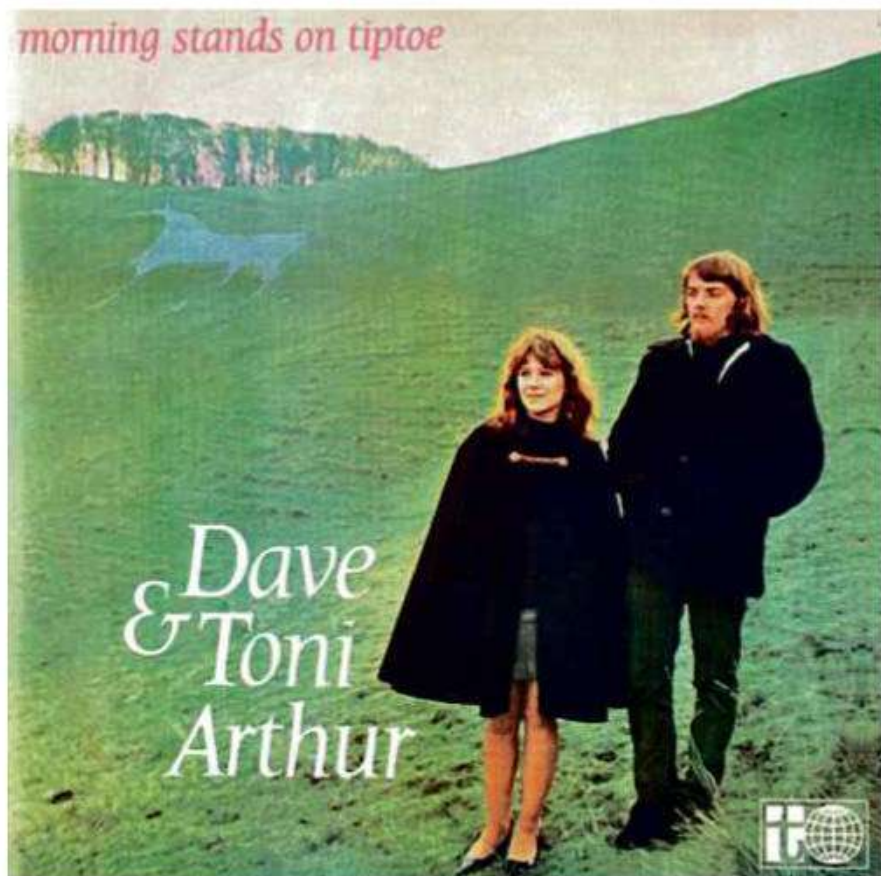
MAGICAL BALLADS

Dave Arthur was born in Cheshire and Antoinette Wilson (“We’ll gloss over that,” she laughs) in Oxford, but both moved to London at an early age. At the turn of the 1960s, the pair met as teenagers at The Twelve Stringer, a late-night coffee bar run by Dave. Toni, then a nurse at University College Hospital, was brought along one night by her flatmate, the promising blues guitarist Buddy Watson.

They married in 1963, moving to Oxford to run a university bookshop while simultaneously building a reputation on the folk club circuit. Their 7” version of traditional folk song ‘The Cuckoo’, recorded as The Strollers, was released on the Fontana label in 1965. Its crossover folk-pop stylings, however, were absent from the minimalist albums that followed: *Morning Stands on Tiptoe* (1967) and *The Lark in the Morning* (1969). Both are beautiful essays in unaccompanied traditional song with a distinct leaning towards the pastoral. As the decade wore on, the Arthurs’ interests progressed from interpreting established folk club favourites to actively seeking out hitherto uncelebrated stories and songs – with an increasing leaning towards the uncanny.

“When I got more into folk and traditional music, all these magical ballads appeared, and it was exactly what I’d been interested in all along... a fascination with the supernatural,” explains Dave. “Wherever we went in the country, we would always spend our





ABOVE: *Morning Stands On Tiptoe*, Dave and Toni's 1967 debut album, and *The Lark In The Morning*, their 1969 follow-up LP. BELOW: Dave and Toni in 1968.

time between gigs in libraries and archives: the Mitchell Library in Glasgow; the broad-side ballad collection in Preston Library, among others.

"And everywhere we went, we would be tracking people down and interviewing them. Going out to the countryside, to Travellers and canal barge people, fairground people, and – particularly – farmers. Talking to them and recording them."

One folk tale collected in such a manner is alluded to on 'Magic in Ballads', a hand-typed four-page pamphlet included with the first pressing of *Hearken to the Witches Rune*. "In Norfolk a while ago," it begins, "an old farmer told us about a horseman who sold his soul to the Devil..."

"He sold his soul and underwent the Toad Ritual," says Dave, continuing the story 50 years on. "Finding a walking toad and burying it until the ants have eaten all the flesh, then throwing the bones into running water. This has to be renewed every seven years, but he didn't manage it – he didn't find a toad in time. And he went into the barn one morning to get his horse's harness, and the whole thing just burst into flames. He died in the inferno."

"That was told to us by an old farmer in Norfolk as a true story. He said he knew the people it had happened to."

"It's like any form of mythology," adds Toni. "People are frightened of their surroundings, so you get supernatural things coming out."

This hands-on collection of oral tradition followed in the footsteps of singer and folklorist AL "Bert" Lloyd, whose 1950s crusade to document – and, indeed, perform – the vanishing folk tales and songs of the British Isles was clearly an inspiration to the youthful duo.

"We did an awful lot of research," says



Toni, now a Norfolk resident herself. "It was a passion, a complete passion. And there was no time when we went around the countryside that we didn't stop at places and look at things. Markets used to be a big thing. I wore a beautiful horse brass that represented the three stages of the Moon... I've still got it on the beam of an Inglenook, near where I sit. It's absolutely gorgeous, and supposedly the Queen of the Witches wore it. So I used to wear it round my neck... it's actually pretty heavy!"

And, as detailed in 'Magic in Ballads', the duo's interest in the secret rituals of the Norfolk horsemen led to conversations with Scottish folklorist Hamish Henderson, who had collected similar tales of the Horseman's Word – "an anti-Calvinist farm workers guild, with smatterings of the occult".

"When we sang in Scotland, we'd spend time in Edinburgh with Hamish," says Dave. "Drinking, most of the time – in his

favourite malt whisky bar. But talking about folklore and ballads, obviously. And we mentioned to him at some point about the Toad Men in Norfolk and the Horseman's Word, and he sent us some information that he had.

"And then someone wrote to me out of the blue. Their grandfather had *been* in the Horseman's Word, and they sent me pages and pages of transcripts... what he remembered of some of the songs he'd learnt at these convivial meetings. They used to get together, get hammered in the markets, and sing these songs about shagging Queen Victoria!"

"So that was all going on at the time. We took bits from Hamish, bits from Bert Lloyd, bits that we'd come across, and we'd put versions of songs together that we felt told these stories to our satisfaction. That's what we were doing at the time we met Alex Sanders."

KING OF THE WITCHES

By the mid-1960s, Alex Sanders was already a high-profile figure. The so-called 'King of the Witches' was on the verge of transplanting his Wiccan coven from Manchester to fashionable west London, and was attracting national tabloid attention. "HORROR 'WEDDING' IN A WITCHES TEMPLE" was the headline of a full-page "exposé" by Peter Forbes in *The People*, dated Sunday 5 December 1965. "Maxine Morris is blonde, slim and just 18," wrote an outraged Forbes. "And on Wednesday, she will give herself to a man old enough to be her father."

"She will become the bride of 39-year-old Alex Sanders in the name of witchcraft... black candles will burn on the witches' altar. The air will be heavy with incense... and into this vile mockery of a wedding ceremony will step little Maxine, naked

under a white wedding dress that Sanders has made for her.”

By the end of the decade, the Sanders’ notoriety as the first celebrity couple of 20th century Wicca had been cemented, their religion now enthusiastically practised from a basement flat in Notting Hill. In 1966, both Alex and Maxine had appeared as TV chat show guests of jazz saxophonist Benny Green on Rediffusion’s *Late Show London*, and a slew of media attention followed. By 1969, the Sanders’ profile was sufficient to warrant a biography: June Johns’s *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders* was published by Pan Books. In January 1970, both Alex and Maxine were featured on BBC1 current affairs show *24 Hours* and, in March, Alex was a studio guest on *The Simon Dee Show*, alongside – curiously – Dennis Wheatley.

“We’d heard about Alex,” says Dave. “We saw an interview on television or in a newspaper. He was notorious, a great self-publicist. We found out where he was and said we were interested in the background to these magical songs, and asked if he would talk to us about it. He was very generous, and we went to Clanricarde Gardens. He and Maxine had their temple in the basement, laid out with a huge pentacle on the floor.”

“We had an afternoon chatting to him, and he said ‘Are you interested in joining my group?’ And that was it – that was ex-



THEIR TEMPLE WAS IN THE BASEMENT WITH A HUGE PENTAGRAM LAID OUT ON THE FLOOR

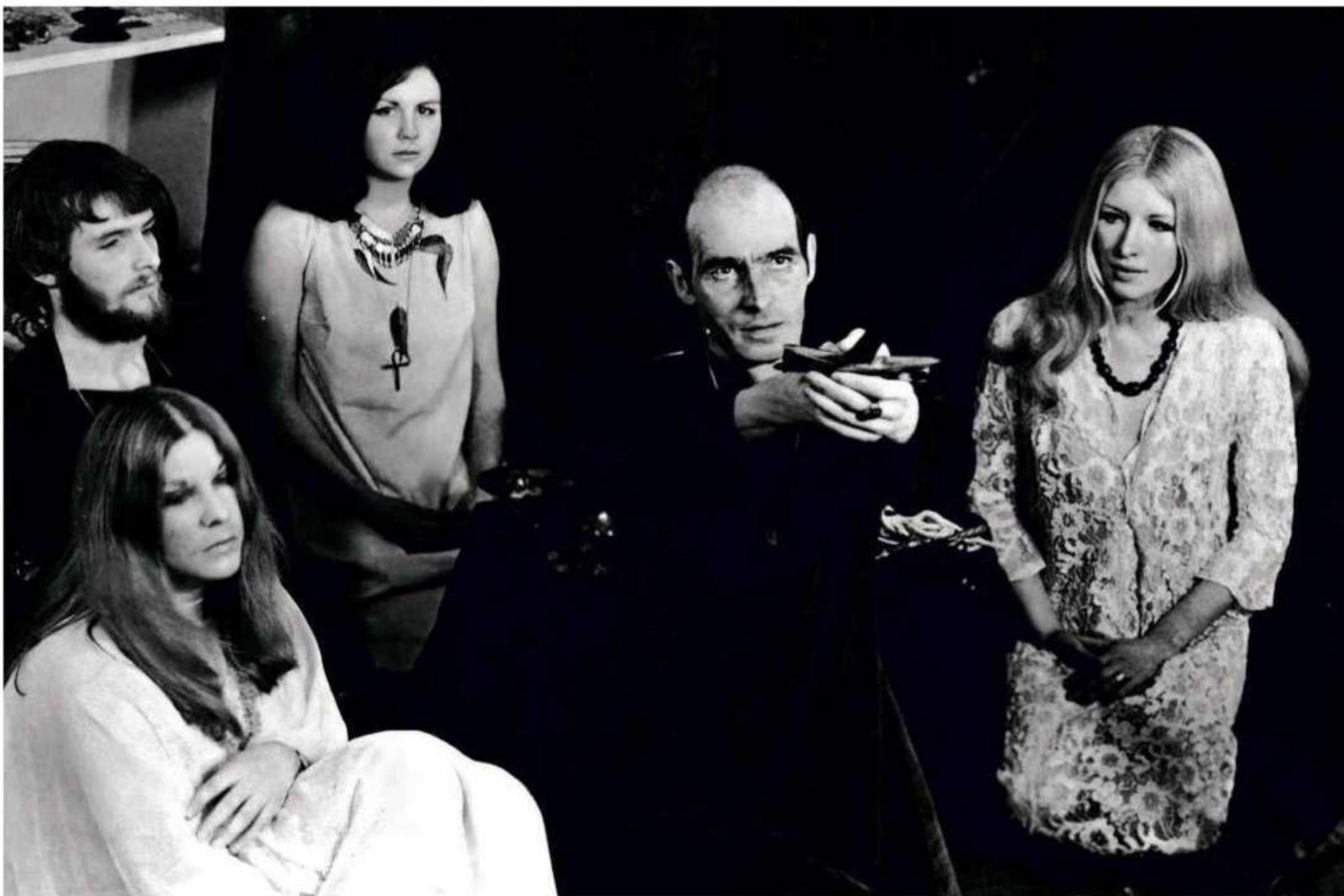
actly what we wanted. We wanted to find out how much of Wicca, the modern witchcraft, was based on traditional stuff, and how much traditional material had been carried through in the form of ballads.”

“Most people at that time were really scared of that kind of thing,” says Toni. “Witchcraft still had such a bad name. But the more you researched it, you just found that it was another form of religion. A way of life. People confused witchcraft with black magic, and it just wasn’t that. The Wiccans we knew were working for the good of things.”

Both Dave and Toni are keen to emphasise Alex’s impish sense of mischief, a factor that may explain the Sanders coven’s rather outré public image. “He had a great sense of humour, actually,” says Dave. “He said ‘If you come along, you do realise it’s a sex orgy? It’s all naked, and we roll about all over, but if you want to know about Wicca then this is it. Come down next Tuesday night...’

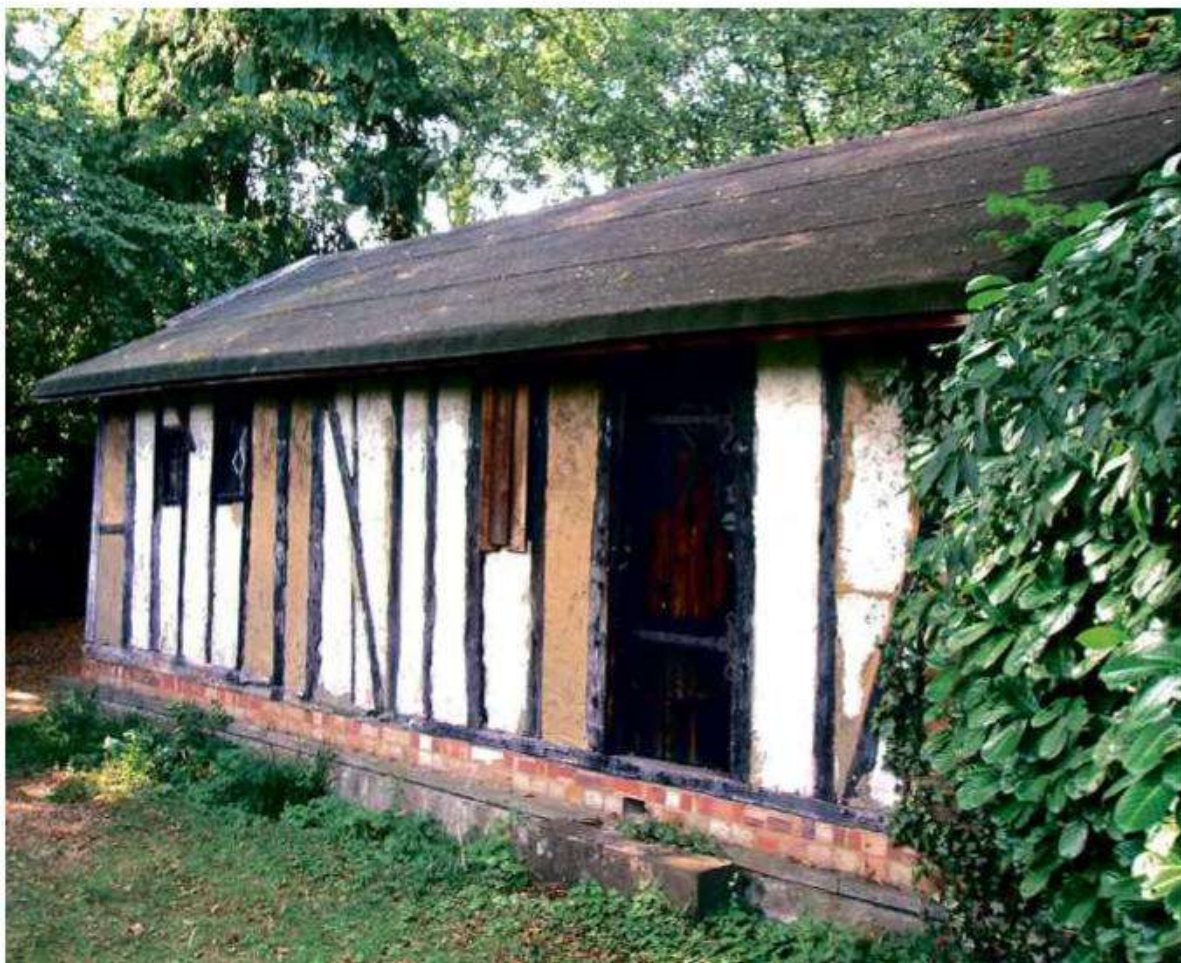
“We said ‘Thanks ever so much, Alex,’ and went home. As much as we wanted to find out about it, we didn’t want to go rolling around naked and indulging in orgies! We rang him up and said ‘We’ll pass on the orgies if that’s OK...’ Our interest wasn’t anything to do with that – it was a serious study of narrative and folklore and the continuation of folklore ideas into modern

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE



COURTESY DAVE ARTHUR

ABOVE: Alex and Maxine Sanders with members of their coven. TOP: A promotional lobby card for the 1970 cinema release of *Legend of the Witches*.



COURTESY DAVE ARTHUR

ABOVE: Alex Sanders with his Tarot pack. LEFT: The 'witches hut' of the Bricket Wood coven, founded by Wiccan pioneer Gerald Gardner in the late 1940s and still going strong in the 1960s.

witchcraft.

"And he said 'That's OK, I was just winding you up.' He said it was a test and, had we agreed to visit in expectation of some sort of sexual event, he would have turned us away."

Toni laughs. "He was a strange bugger, he really was!" she says, with clear affection. "He liked having a joke."

And the other coven members? "They were all people that didn't really fit into a lot of other places," she remembers. "And yet they really belonged there. They were going there because they wanted to worship something. I remember at that time thinking of Spike Milligan – 'Hello trees, hello world!'. They were really lovely. They weren't 'grand', they were ordinary people."

The activities of the Sanders coven during this period are immortalised in Malcolm Leigh's documentary film *Legend of the Witches*, released in cinemas in February 1970. Swathed in psychedelic sitars and stroboscopic lights, it features Alex and Maxine conducting an array of occult rituals; their frequent state of undress doubtless responsible for much of the fevered media attention they attracted.

"There was nakedness, no doubt about that!" says Dave. "That wasn't a problem, that didn't bother us. What *would* have bothered us was it being some excuse for an orgy, which it wasn't at all. It was a serious thing."

"Alex opened the circle up, and went round – North, South, East, West, all that – and called down the Gods. And then there'd usually be a 'working' for somebody who was ill. We'd all wish them well and tie knots – knot magic, cord magic – to try and help people. I was perfectly happy doing all of that – nothing bothered me."

THEIR FREQUENT STATE OF UNDRRESS WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MEDIA ATTENTION

"But the basic problem is that I'm non-religious. I'm an atheist. I don't believe in any of that. I'm *interested*, but I wouldn't go along with it as a belief. I don't believe in any sort of god, let alone Old Gods. I'm interested from an academic point of view, but not from a practical, performing point of view."

COVENS AND CARDS

The Sanders coven, however, wasn't the only esoteric meeting attended by the Arthurs. The Bricket Wood coven had been founded in Hertfordshire in the late 1940s by retired civil servant and 20th century Wiccan pioneer Gerald Gardner (see FT343:55-56), and – by the late 1960s – counted accomplished studio engineer Dick Swettenham amongst its members. Swettenham had worked at Abbey Road and Olympic Studios and had become a director of Topic Records, the pioneering folk label that had released *The Lark in the Morning*. His presence on the Wiccan scene might suggest that interest in the religion was becoming widespread in folk music circles, but the couple deny this.

"I think you may have found it all!" says Toni. "At that time, as far as we knew, it was just Dick Swettenham and us."

Dave agrees. "Nobody knew about Dick

Swettenham, he kept it quiet. He was a very respected sound engineer designing exotic desks for big companies, and at that time it wasn't a thing you promoted. You certainly wouldn't go out saying 'I'm Dick Swettenham, I'm a designer of very expensive desks for Decca Records... and oh, by the way, I'm a witch!'

"We went up to the Gardnerian coven. Dick took us, because he knew we were interested in magic and witchcraft. We went to a couple of their meetings, in Gerald Gardner's original Elizabethan cabin, and it was fascinating. But we found the people who took a less intellectual approach – to put it nicely – got more out of it, and felt more powerful, than the people who were merely intellectualising. You'd get farm or building labourers who had no intellectual pretensions, but had a deep *feeling* for things. They weren't acting anything out – they believed in it wholeheartedly, and it seemed to work for them."

Toni agrees. "It was very, very clever people saying: 'This is a very clever bit, and now we've learned this and we've learned that, we're going to do this and... oh my goodness, it doesn't work'."

"Whereas with Alex's place, the simplicity was almost tangible. You knew you were in a place where people were protecting you. It's strange. I'm not Christian. I'm Buddhist. But if I needed to go to a church to worship in that way, I would look up to a priest like that."

Both Dave and Toni are also keen to stress the altruistic side of the Sanders coven.

"Alex tried to do an awful lot of work for people with mental health troubles," says Toni. "Especially when they thought they were hearing voices. He would say 'But you're so chosen, to hear those voices.'"

Dave concurs. “He would say ‘The thing to do is to control the voices: if they’re coming to you at inopportune moments, say: Come back, and we’ll talk later.’ It empowered them and really helped them. We saw people who were living quite happily in control, and the voices weren’t taking them over’.

Meanwhile, Toni was finding her interest in the otherworldly extending beyond the purely academic.

“It was Alex that taught me to read Tarot cards,” she recalls. “He said to me one day ‘Look – you’re doing all this research, you can read the Tarot.’ And I’d never heard the expression ‘Tarot cards’ before. Not at all. But he said ‘I’ve got a brand-new pack, and they must be yours – you must never let anybody else touch them. Keep shuffling them, and I’m going to show you a pattern you can lay them in. And I’m going to bring a lady down, and while you’re talking to her just assess everything about her then lay the cards out exactly as you think...’”

“So this lady came down – she was Greek. She was absolutely fabulous – a little tiny lady, full of joy. And I laid the cards out, and probably started with ‘I see you come from a foreign land...’ Which... hello! Was so obvious. But I was very worried about something that was coming up, something that the cards seemed to be telling me. And Alex said ‘You’ve missed out an obvious thing. Are you not interested in what she does for a living?’

“I said ‘No, no, I’m not...’

“He said ‘By the sound of your voice, you are... just tell her!’

“So I said ‘You’re a prostitute, aren’t you?’

“And she was!”

She qualifies this: “I thought I was intellectually interested, not spiritually. At that time, I didn’t really think about the strange things that had happened to me earlier in my life, I just thought they were strange. I didn’t join the two up at the time. That came later.”

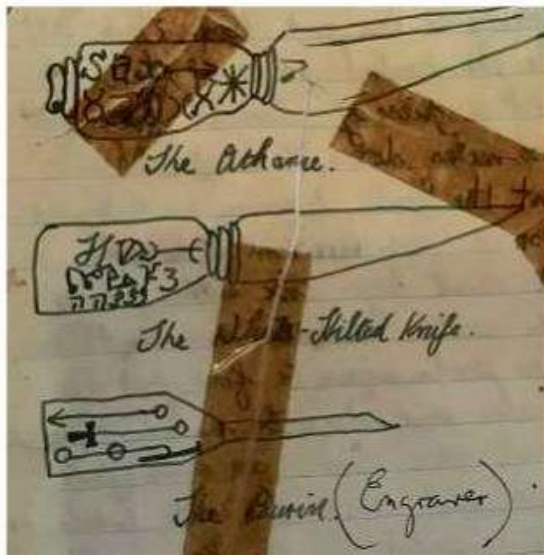
Although British folk tales and songs are riddled with tales of *ancient* witchcraft, the Arthurs concluded that the folk tradition had failed to permeate the texts and practices of 20th century Wicca. Nevertheless, they found entertaining ways to combine the two. “Toni and I sang ‘John Barleycorn’ to accompany a cod ritual Alex put together to satisfy the curiosity of a German film crew,” remembers Dave. “It involved tipping bags of flour over people, some business with corn dollies, and culminated with beer being poured over the heads of the celebrants. It was a very messy but quite spectacular ‘ritual’!

But the German director loved it, and went away very happy.”

RECORDING THE RUNES

By 1970, the couple were ready to begin the sessions that would become *Hearken to the Witches Rune*, an album recorded in a manner that will gladden the hearts of locked-down, lo-fi 21st century musicians. With the couple’s favoured producer Bill Leader at the helm, the entire LP was recorded on a reel-to-reel tape machine in the north London flat occupied by both Bill and his wife Helen.

“5 North Villas, Camden Town,” nods Dave. “Bill and Helen were up on the first floor. And the recording was done on a Revox A77 – in their bedroom, I think. We cleared a space out, and the bed was in the corner. There were records everywhere – the walls were covered in terrifyingly weighty 78s and Christ knows what else. If they’d have come down on someone, they’d



have killed them.”

Endearingly, the room used for the recording sessions is the only point in the entire story where which Dave and Toni’s memories diverge.

“I didn’t know Bill Leader’s bedroom, I can assure you of that!” laughs Toni. “No, it was next door to the kitchen. There was a permanent screen with a door in it, dividing one half of the room from the other. One part of it was the sitting room, and the other was the kitchen. And we recorded everything in the sitting room area – which would quite often smell of onions if somebody had just been cooking.”

“You only had to walk in there and you sounded as though you were walking through an autumn forest,” she smiles. “There were piles of tape all over the floor...”

The album’s title is taken from the *Book of Shadows*, the Wiccan text originally compiled by Gerald Gardner and his High Priestess Doreen Valiente around the turn of the 1950s. Tradition dictates that coven members must create their own version of the book, copied out by hand – a task Dave completed using Alex Sanders’s own handwritten copy as his source material. The phrase itself is included in ‘The Witch’s Chant’, a poem composed by Valiente:

*Darksome night and shining Moon
Hell’s dark mistress Heaven’s Queen
Harken to the Witches’ Rune
Diana, Lilith, Melusine!*

An alternate version exists, also written by Valiente and entitled ‘The Witches

Rune’; and Sanders’s interpretation of the rhyme, as copied out by Dave and reproduced on the album’s back sleeve, has further variations. Dave is intrigued enough to mull over a full, future investigation. The front cover of the album, meanwhile, features the Arthurs looking suitably haunted, emerging from an all-pervading darkness in flowing, red robes. It was taken, Dave tells me, in the family garden – the ethereal lighting provided by the headlights of Bill Leader’s car.

Even the album’s release, on Leader’s own Trailer Records, is shrouded in some degree of mystery. The back sleeve boldly states “First released 1970”, but the label on the vinyl has a 1971 copyright notice. The autumn 1970 edition of the quarterly *English Dance & Song* magazine lists it as a forthcoming release,



ABOVE LEFT: A page from Alex Sanders’s copy of the *Book of Shadows*.
LEFT: Doreen Valiente, High Priestess of the Bricket Wood coven.



but didn't review it until autumn 1971. Neither Dave nor Toni are entirely sure, and neither is Bill – now aged 91 and living in quiet retirement in Manchester. The Internet, typically, is equally vague. Toni at least narrows down the date of the cover photo shoot: she remembers being heavily pregnant with the couple's son Tim, born in September 1970.

Listening to *Hearken to the Witches Rune* in 2021 is just as startling an experience as it must have been in 1971. As with their previous albums, the Arthurs' voices are at times starkly unaccompanied, although veteran Irish musician Packie Byrne adds tin whistle to 'The Fairy Child'. Based on a poem by 19th century Dublin lyricist Samuel Lover, it's a mother's haunting lament for a child abducted by fairies. Young violinist Nic Jones contributes to 'Broomfield Hill' – the tale of a young maiden using magical powers to protect her virginity from the attention of a boastful knight – and also plays on 'Alice Brand', in which a runaway couple wage an occult battle against a vengeful Elfin King. And equally youthful fiddle-player Kevin Burke enjoys a tour-de-force performance on 'A Fairy Tale', a medley of three traditional Irish instrumentals introduced by Dave.

I ask both Dave and Toni to select their favourite tracks from the album.

"That lovely version of 'A Fairy Child', with Packie Byrne's whistle on it," says Dave. Toni's got a great voice. That was one we didn't change; we actually just took the poem and Packie played the whistle."

Toni agrees. "'The Fairy Child', because of Packie Byrne," she says. "I absolutely adored Packie, I can't tell you... he was the nicest, loveliest man. He sat opposite me, looking like a fairy. He was quite old then, with pure white hair. We looked into each other's eyes, with the microphones between us, and we just... well, if you listen to it – we don't veer. We're just going for the words and the meaning of the song."

"And 'The Standing Stones Ballad',"

"I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT! I NEARLY WET MYSELF, IT WAS SO TERRIFYING"

continues Dave, "I love that. That's one we didn't change, because we felt it was the definitive version. We got that from John and Ethel Findlater, an old couple in the Orkneys... they sang in perfect unison, and their daughter played melodeon. It was a lovely track, from a field recording we heard."

The lynchpin of the album is arguably 'Tam Lin'. A traditional Scottish ballad dating back to at least the 16th century. Its central figure Tam-a-Lin seeks release from his bondage to an Elfin Queen, and enlists the help of "Fair Margaret", who vows to spring him from the Elfin court on Hallowe'en night. Despite the Queen's best efforts, transforming Tam-a-Lin into

LEFT: Dave and Toni Arthur at the Cherhill White Horse in 1967. BELOW: Toni became a regular presenter on *Play School* and *Play Away* alongside legends such as Brian Cant and Derek Griffiths; Humpty and co are visible behind Toni.

both a wolf and an adder in his new lover's arms, Margaret is successful. The Arthurs' version was assembled from multiple sources: lyrics collected by Francis James Child in the 19th century, together with a melody uncovered by Hamish Henderson and given to Bert Lloyd to perform. Dave and Toni's version, sung unaccompanied, is stark and potent.

It became an integral part of their live set, its magical properties apparent during a memorable early 1970s performance at Rochester Cathedral, where it seemed to elicit a violent thunderstorm.

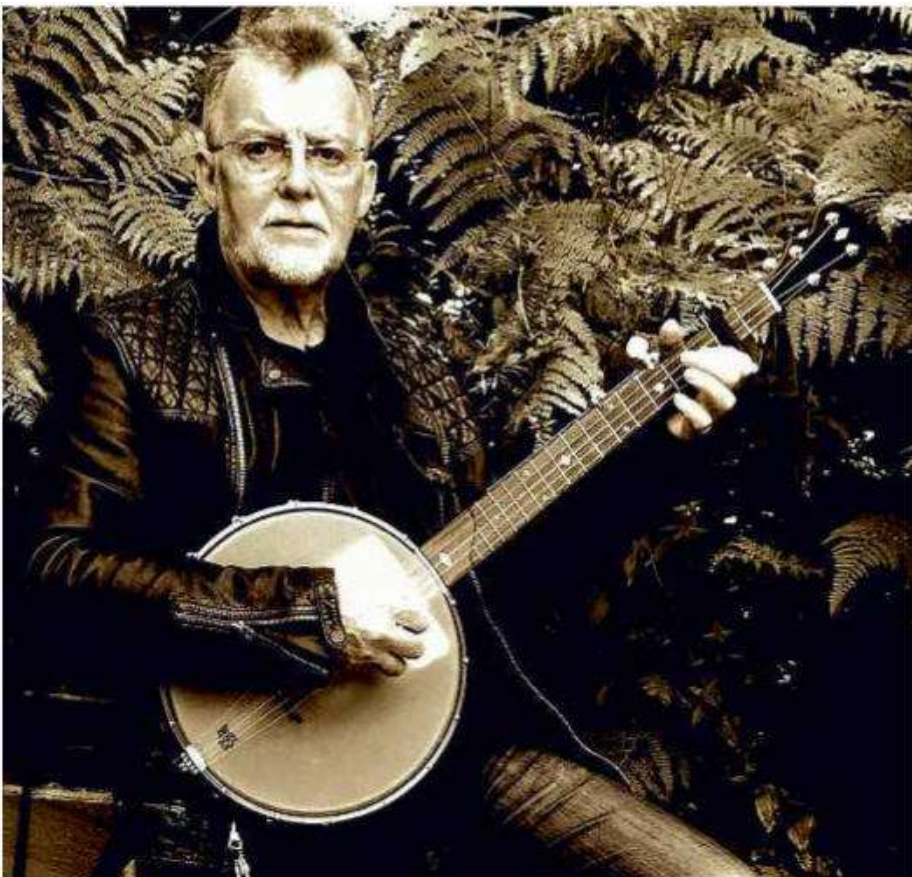
"Oh God! I'll never forget that!" exclaims Toni. I sang 'Out then cried the Elfin Queen...' and... BOOM! BOOM! FLASH! FLASH FLASH! I nearly wet myself, it was so terrifying. The whole audience went 'Aaaaah!' And the next line is 'And an angry woman was she...' God, it was really, really frightening."

The duo also took Tam Lin into unexpected musical realms. For the sixth episode of Dave's BBC Radio 3 series *Arthur's Folk*, broadcast on Friday 1 July 1977, the couple enlisted the BBC Radiophonic Workshop's Paddy Kingsland – later celebrated for his work on *Doctor Who* and *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – to help transform the ancient ballad into an electronic folk-rock epic.

"We wanted to use the potential of folk rock," explains Dave, "But why stop at that? Why not explore other potentials? Which, at that time, was Radiophonics. So we started off acoustic and unaccompanied, but we had a rock drummer and two session singers. Me on the guitar, Toni on recorder, and a classical keyboard. It slowly built up, then the electric band came in. And the end of the ballad was done over *Doctor Who*-type music, with swirling sounds creating an atmosphere."

"We had a good quality copy," says Toni,





ABOVE: Dave Arthur and Toni Arthur-Hay as they are today – still good friends.

“But one of our children threw a party that we weren’t supposed to know about. And the reel-to-reel ended up in a pot that had a huge monstera plant in it. You know, the cheeseplants? And somebody peed all over it...”

FIFTY YEARS ON

By this time, of course, the lives of both Dave and Toni had changed immeasurably. Toni, after being encouraged to audition by BBC producer and folk fan Peter Charlton, secured a job as a regular presenter of children’s TV staples *Play School* and *Play Away*, taking her place alongside the likes of Johnny Ball, Brian Cant, Floella Benjamin and Derek Griffiths. Dave contributed too, writing songs and performing on both shows. “Folk music is perfect for kids’ TV,” he says. “It’s gentle, the tunes are interesting, you can write nice lyrics... it’s an easy way into kids’ songwriting.”

I was curious to know if the short leap from Alex Sanders’s coven to reading stories for Humpty and Big Ted had felt incongruous for Toni – clearly not. “It didn’t even occur to me that the two would get linked,” she says. “We were hippies, and nobody minded about anything.” She pauses and laughs again. “I remember presenting *Seeing and Doing*, dressed as a witch and running all over Hampstead Heath. It was a rich time.”

Though Toni and Dave separated in 1993, they remain good friends. Dave continues to write, perform and record music: in 2020, his band Rattle on the Stovepipe released *Through The Woods*. Available through Wildgoose Records, it’s a hugely enjoyable exploration of traditional American song. He works as a storyteller too, continuing to research magical folk tales and still taking inspiration from “the atmosphere and psychological aspects of magical ritual”

he experienced during his time with the Sanders coven. Toni – now Toni Arthur-Hay following her marriage to writer and academic Malcolm Hay – enjoyed a highly successful TV career and has also worked as a writer and theatre director. She’s a fine actor, too: her 1978 *Play for Today*, ‘Stargazy on Zummerdown’, is an extraordinary piece of television.

And although Alex Sanders died in 1988, the Alexandrian tradition of Wicca continues to attract followers worldwide. It is still practised by Maxine Sanders, whose autobiography *Fire Child: The Life and Magick of Maxine Sanders* was published by Mandrake of Oxford in 2007.

In the weeks following our conversation, both Dave and Toni enthusiastically e-mail over further memories and photographs; and two parcels of (sensational) home-made marmalade arrive from Toni. They both tell me identical tales of being haunted by the ghosts of US airmen in the former Oxfordshire brothel they called home during the early 1960s. And Toni recounts a hair-raising midnight memory from the 1970s: the huge, cloak-wearing, long-haired figure that strode purposefully past their broken-down car in the shadow of the Rollright Stones, before vanishing completely. “He looked a bit like Ted Hughes,” she insists.

Neither had listened to *Hearken to the Witches Rune* for quite some time before I contacted them, and I was keen to know, in the intervening 50 years, whether they’d been aware of the album’s burgeoning reputation.

“I still *am* unaware of it!” laughs Dave. “One thing that amused me... I read some website that had done the 100 Weirdest Records – and it’s on that!”

“We knew it was unique. But the ultimate thing was less good than I would hope

for nowadays. It’s difficult to be objective about your own work, and I can hear all the faults and glitches that I’d want to redo. But if you’re a complete outsider, you listen to it from a different point of view and you might get different things from it. And if you do – great! I’m happy for people that find it interesting and worth listening to.”

“I had absolutely no idea, either,” says Toni. “All I can say is thank you very much, because it was a joy to listen to it. I couldn’t believe how high my voice was – dear God, I sound like some sort of wailing Sheelana-gig!”

They’re being too modest: *Hearken to the Witches Rune* remains an affecting album, powerfully performed. With its 50th anniversary here or thereabouts, let’s gather the runes for a long-deserved reissue.

Eternal thanks to Dave Arthur and Toni Arthur-Hay. And to Jonny Mohun, Andrew T Smith, Steve Jones, and William Fowler and Vic Pratt of the BFI for further advice and research. Members of the mudcat.org folk forum were very helpful, too. And highly recommended is Rob Young’s superlative book *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain’s Visionary Music* (Faber & Faber, 2011), which provided invaluable background reading.



***Legend of the Witches* (together with 1972 film *Secret Rites*, also featuring Alex and Maxine Sanders) is now available on Blu-ray/DVD from the BFI.**

♦ **BOB FISCHER** is the writer of FT’s Haunted Generation column, and an enthusiast of folklore, strange music and retro pop culture. He blogs at www.hauntedgeneration.couk, and tweets @bob_fischer.

ECHOES AND ANGELS

UFOS ON RADAR

Dramatic accounts of sightings by US naval personnel have placed the instrumental evidence for UFOs in the media spotlight. As **DAVID CLARKE** explains, radar is an imperfect tool in the armoury of military investigators – and what it detects is open to many interpretations.

'Whoa, got it – woo-hoo!' 'Roger--' 'What the [expletive] is that?'... 'Oh my gosh, dude. Wow' 'What is that man' 'There's a whole screen of them...' 'They're all going against the wind. The wind's 12 knots from west'... 'Dude...look at that thing!'

Extract from radio chatter between F-18 fighter pilots involved in UFO incidents in 2013-14.

The UFO subculture has been buzzing with stories from military sources collected by a once-secret Pentagon project that investigates anomalous aerial sightings. The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) has been replaced with an 'Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force' led by the Department of the Navy, according to a statement released by the US Department of Defense in August 2020.¹ The role of UAPTF is to "detect, analyse and catalogue UAPs that could potentially pose a threat to US national security". This includes investigation of sightings that are "initially reported as UAP *when the observer cannot immediately identify* what he or she is observing [my emphasis]".² Since the *New York Times* first revealed the existence of AATIP in December 2017, media attention has quite understandably been focused on the striking video footage captured by US Navy aircrew. But much less has been said about the radar detections that triggered military interest in the first place.

TIC-TAC

The most circumstantial story concerns the fast-moving 'Tic-Tac'-shaped UFO reported by F-18 'Super Hornet' pilots David Fravor and Jim Slaight in November 2004. They had been diverted from an exercise to investigate some unusual radar contacts detected



LEFT: A frame from the US Navy 'FLIR' video. **FACING PAGE:** The iconic radome 'golfballs' of RAF Fylingdales.

wood.³ Two more short video clips (nicknamed 'Gimbal' and 'GoFast') were captured by other F-18 pilots during a separate UFO flap off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina in 2013-14.⁴ All three videos received official confirmation from the US Department of Defense in April 2020. But the curious low-key statement that accompanied them simply said that "the aerial phenomena observed in the videos remain characterised as 'unidentified'". To paraphrase Dr J Allen Hynek, consultant to the US Air Force Project Blue Book, "unidentified to whom?".

Cdr Fravor, leader of two F-18s involved in the 2004 incident, has said the radar operator on the USS *Princeton* briefed him they *had*

been tracking anomalous radar targets for two weeks prior to his sighting. He was initially asked to investigate a target at 80,000ft (24,400m) above the Pacific that rapidly fell towards the ocean, where it remained stationary. When Fravor arrived at the 'merge plot' where the target should have been, neither he nor his wingman could see anything, either visually or on their airborne radars. But when he looked down, towards the ocean, he spotted a strange disturbance on the surface of the water. This was the point where he saw a whitish oval-shaped object that he compared to a Tic-Tac shape. This object accelerated away "like nothing I've ever seen". The two pilots were then directed by their controller to investigate another target that had appeared 60 miles (100km) away at their own rendezvous point. By the time they arrived this had disappeared.

The accounts provided by the aircrew

NEITHER HE NOR HIS WINGMAN COULD SEE ANYTHING ON THEIR RADARS

by the cruiser *USS Princeton* that was part of the *USS Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group exercising off the western coast of the US. One piece of footage – nicknamed FLIR after the infrared camera carried by the F-18s – is often linked to their experience but was actually filmed later the same day by a second F-18 flight led by Chad Under-





ABOVE LEFT: The *USS Princeton*, which tracked “anomalous radar contacts” which F-18 pilots David Fravor and Jim Slaight were dispatched to investigate. The *Princeton* had been equipped with upgrades to its radar system. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Pilot Chad Underwood, whose F-18 flight actually filmed the ‘FLIR’ footage.

sound impressive, but the devil is in the detail. Analysis of the FLIR footage by Mick West of Metabunk produced some familiar explanations. The impressive sudden departure of the object is an illusion; West found it does not actually move except when the aircraft’s own infrared camera moves. He believes the object “resembles an out-of-focus low-resolution backlit plane” filmed at distance.⁵ A US Navy summary of the incident confirms that Chad Underwood, the pilot, “was clear that he couldn’t confirm that it was the same object as described by [Cdr Fravor] ... he never had visual, only seeing the object via the FLIR [infrared camera].”⁶ Underwood told the *New York* magazine *Intelligencer*: “It’s just what we call a UFO. I couldn’t identify it. It was flying. And it was an object. It’s as simple as that.” Mick West admits he does not know what Cdr Fravor saw, but concludes the FLIR footage does not contain any evidence of advanced technology. He feels the US Navy must have arrived at similar conclusions *if this is the best evidence* available to them. But if, as claimed, UFOs were constantly buzzing sensitive US Navy assets, then why have we yet to see any incontrovertible evidence from US Navy radars? Independent analysis of these would help to settle the debate about the ‘unidentified’ aerial phenomena depicted on the footage released so far.

It may be significant that both US Navy carrier groups that reported UFO flaps in 2004 and 2014-15 had only recently re-joined fleet exercises after they had undergone major upgrades of their radar systems. The *USS Princeton* was testing a sophisticated phased array radar system that was intended for use in exercises involving

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE OF THE CALIBRE OF THE PILOT WITNESSES

conventional aircraft. The US Navy’s report on the incident says “it never obtained an accurate track” of the UFOs pursued by Cdr Fravor. They were quickly dropped by the *Princeton*’s radar when the computer catego-

rised them as ‘false targets’. When operators become more familiar with the presence of UFOs on radars, they either ignore them or their equipment is adjusted to eliminate ‘noise’ from the displays. Decades earlier, radar meteorologist Kenneth Hardy warned against using such detections as evidence for UFOs because “strange and bewildering radar echoes will be seen occasionally as new radars are put into operation or as the existing radars carry out their remote probing mission.”⁷

CREDIBLE WITNESSES?

Much has been made of the impressive calibre of the fighter pilot witnesses. The cult of the ‘credible witness’, especially if they have military or police experience, is a



ABOVE: Navy Pilot Cdr David Fravor was interviewed on television about his UFO encounter. He compared what he saw to a “Tic-Tac” and said that it accelerated away “like nothing I’ve ever seen”.

WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN? COMMON SOURCES OF RADAR UFOs

During the 1930s British scientists discovered that when radio waves from a transmitter struck targets such as aircraft, ships and buildings they bounced back and could be detected by a receiver. The Air Ministry quickly began to develop a functioning early warning system that could be used to calculate the distance, direction and height of German aircraft by listening for the echoes returned from bursts of radio waves. Originally known as Radio Direction and Finding (RDF) the term 'radar' was adopted during WWII when the Chain Home system, built around the English coastline, was the key to the success of the RAF in the Battle of Britain. But despite their success, early radar systems were cluttered by noise from birds, insects, weather systems and unusual atmospheric conditions. Here are some of the most common explanations for UFOs on radar:

'ANGELS'

Angels were first mentioned by radar personnel at the dawn of the modern UFO era to describe invisible targets in the clear atmosphere. In March 1941 Chain Home radars detected a formation of blips moving across the English Channel. RAF fighters were sent to intercept but their crews saw nothing and the blips faded (**FT195:36-7**). Similar 'angels' plagued the more powerful Type 80 centimetric radars that were introduced from 1954 and became a hazard for air traffic controllers. A Fighter Command investigation concluded most of these were caused by migrating seabirds and others were the result of 'anomalous propagation'. Computers filtered out smaller echoes and increased the strength of those created by aircraft. The invention of transponders that transmit an electronic identification signal from aircraft to ground control helped to further reduce clutter on ATC radars. This means that 'aerial phenomena' appear on radar today only if they intrude on flightpaths and create a near miss of the type investigated by the Civil Aviation Authority's Airprox board (**FT291:26-27**).



ABOVE: Towers at the former Swingate Chain Home Radar station near Dover.

'ANOMALOUS PROPAGATION'

This is caused by unusual meteorological conditions that trap and bend radio waves along the surface of the Earth. AP can result in radio energy being returned from objects at distances far in excess of the radar's normal range of operation. Sometimes moving objects such as cars, ships and low-flying aircraft have been superimposed on the usual radar picture. AP may be the ultimate source of some classic radar UFO flaps including those that plagued Washington DC during the summer of 1952 and RAF Bentwaters-Lakenheath in 1956 (**FT213:28-32**). Measurements of extreme speed and height of anomalous radar targets are completely worthless if the observer is unaware that AP is present and even experienced operators have been fooled. More recently, clear air radar echoes created by backscattering from fluctuations of the index of refraction in the atmosphere have been detected by scientists using powerful radars operating at several wavelengths. One of the pioneers of radar meteorology, Dr David Atlas (1924-2015), said these experiments prove "the atmosphere will effect radar propagation in almost unbelievable ways and produce virtual targets which have apparently fantastic manoeuvrability."

PERMANENT ECHOES

On occasion, prominent buildings have been reported as potential UFOs when ground controllers have been alerted, in real time, to mysterious visual sightings. A classic example

occurred in October 1996 when the 273ft (83m) spire of Boston Stump appeared on civilian and RAF radars at the height of a UFO flap in East Anglia. The presence of the stationary echo was only flagged up as unusual when staff at RAF Neatishead in Norfolk were alerted by police and others who had spotted strange lights in the sky above The Wash (**FT223:28-29**). This case even fooled defence intelligence experts. Ron Haddow listed it as the "only UK event" where three radars had simultaneously detected a UFO in UK airspace in the Condign report he produced for MoD in 2000.

INTERFERENCE

Mysterious moving echoes can appear on radars when two or more transmitters are close together. The MoD's Flying Saucer Working Party investigated one example in 1950 when a sighting made by a RAF Meteor pilot initially appeared to have strong corroboration from a ground radar station in Sussex. Inquiries found the sighting occurred 10 minutes before the radar detection and traced the interference to a Naval radar in the English Channel. Some of the hypersonic targets detected by Belgian Air Force F-16s in March 1990 were caused by the aircraft's own radars interfering with each other in a similar manner.

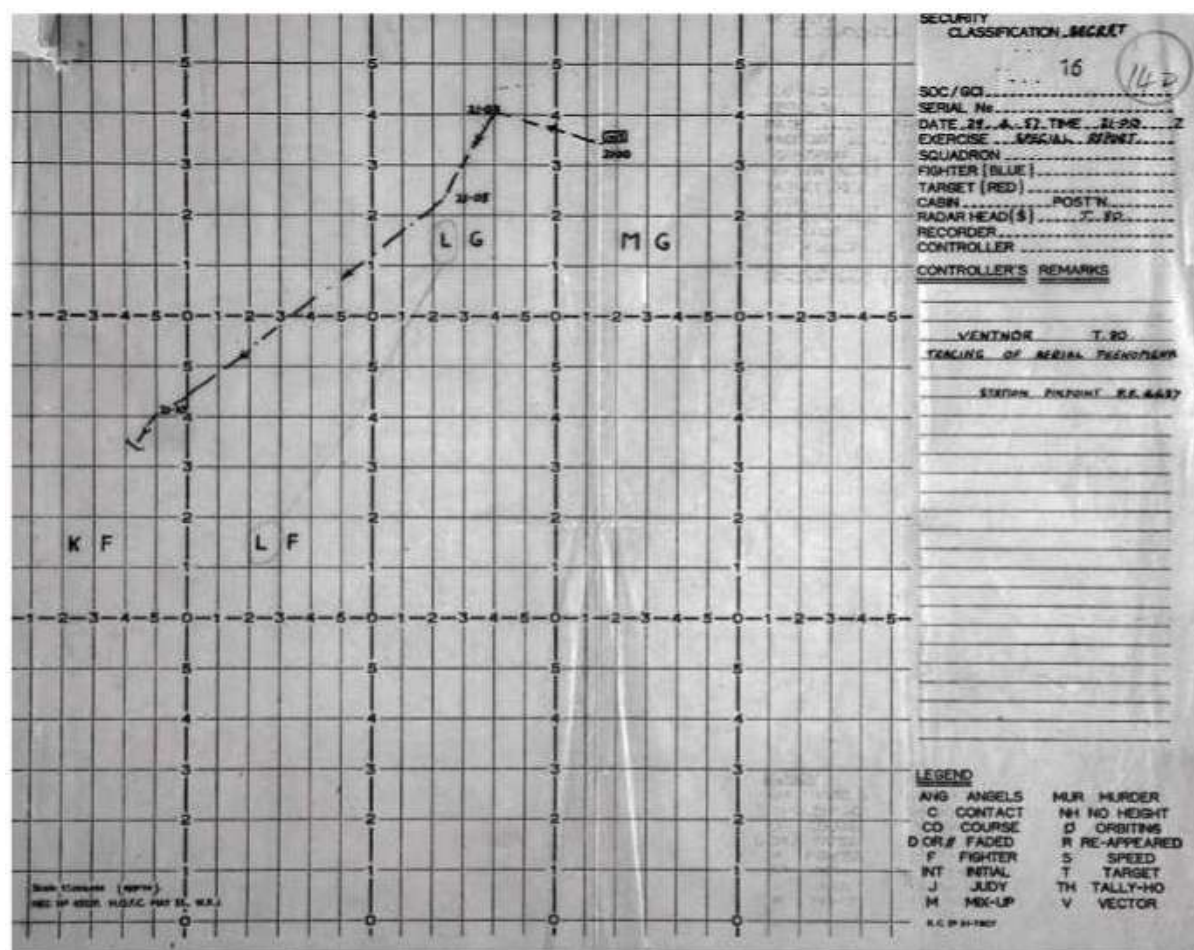
ECM: JAMMING AND SPOOFING

Electronic Counter Measures are techniques developed by military intelligence agencies to fool enemies. Early crude examples include dropping 'chaff' – strips

of reflective foil – to jam defence radars during air raids. In 1998 the CIA revealed the existence of a formerly top-secret project, code-named Palladium, that was developed alongside the U2 spyplane in the 1950s to insert phantom aircraft into enemy radars. It was used during the Cuban crisis and later during the Vietnam war. Project leader Gene Poteat said it allowed them to "simulate an aircraft of any radar cross-section from an invisible stealth airplane to one that made a large blip on Soviet radar screens – and anything in between, at any speed and altitude, and fly it along any path." A secret CIA-MoD experiment with Palladium might explain the radar UFO reported by USAF F-86 pilot Lt Milton Torres who was sent to investigate a blip detected by RAF radars in East Anglia one night in 1956-57 (see **FT242:34-35**). Torres's airborne radar locked onto the 'object', which appeared to be the size of a B52 bomber, and he was ordered by the ground controller to open fire with his rockets. But 10 seconds before he received authentication the 'bogey' broke away and disappeared at great speed. There was no visual sighting. On return to base Torres was debriefed by a secret service agent and told his mission was Top Secret. He did not discuss it again until 1986 after retirement from the USAF.

BLACK PROJECT AIRCRAFT

According to intelligence expert Richard Aldrich, during the Cold War air defence radars in the West were frequently triggered by incursions by Black Project aircraft developed by the CIA and USAF. Incursions by 'friendly' Black Projects have continued with the deployment of the radar-invisible F-117A Stealth and B2 bombers in Europe from the early 1990s. The existence of the top-secret hypersonic Aurora spyplane has been denied, but declassified MoD files reveal that intelligence officers declared they "would not be surprised" if covert visits were the source of some UFO incidents reported in the UK.

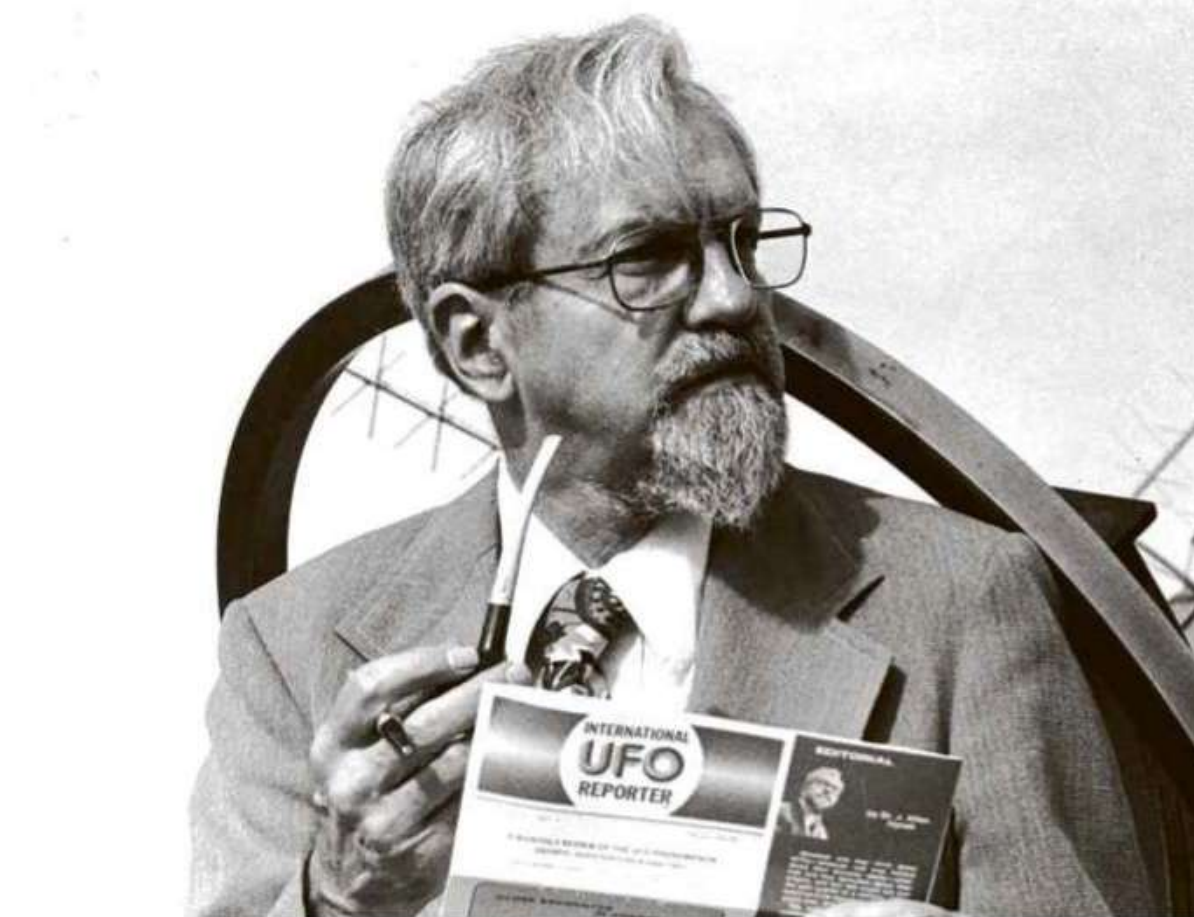


LEFT: A reproduction of a tracing-paper overlay that was used in the 1940s and 50s to mark the movements of 'X-raids' (unidentified radar tracks) in RAF radar control rooms. This one is from 29 April 1957 and shows the movements of 'aerial phenomena' over southern England tracked by Type 80 radar at RAF Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. This 'UFO' resulted in the scramble of Javelin interceptors that pursued it as far as Lands End at a height of 45,000ft (13,700m) before they lost it. **CENTRE LEFT:** Dr J Allen Hynek was not convinced of the reliability of radar data. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A photo purporting to show one of the 'Belgian Triangles' of the 1990 flap.

recurring theme in the UFO industry's rhetoric. But the experts assembled by the multimedia entertainment company promoting the stories appear to be unaware of the findings by earlier official UFO projects that should encourage a more cautious approach to witness testimony. Dr Hynek, who was consultant for the USAF's UFO project for two decades from 1948, analysed thousands of similar reports and concluded, surprisingly, that "commercial and military pilots appear to make relatively poor witnesses."⁸ He turned to psychology for an explanation, noting how those with skill and experience in one field (flying a military jet and identifying other aircraft) do not necessarily transfer that competence to another field (identifying unfamiliar aerial phenomena). Radar personnel did not fare much better either. Drawing upon the database of Radar-Visual cases logged by Blue Book, Hynek expected that cases involving both radar and visual corroboration of UFOs *should* offer more reliable data; but "such is unfortunately not the case" and that conclusion remains true today.

Another instructive case occurred 30 years ago following a wave of UFO sightings over Belgium. On two occasions in December 1989 the Belgian Air Force scrambled F-16 jets in response to UFO reports by *gendarmes* that *appeared* to correlate with unusual radar targets seen by ground radars. But nothing was seen by the aircrew and they returned to base. Then on the night of 30-31 March 1990 the BAF decided to scramble again after police reports of flickering lights in the sky were linked to radar targets by two ground radar stations south of Brussels. According to the Chief of Operations in the Belgian Air Staff, Major General Wilfried De Brouwer, "once aloft the pilots tried to intercept the alleged craft, and at one point recorded targets on their radar with unusual behaviour, such as jumping huge distances in seconds and accelerating beyond human capacity."⁹

Both jets were equipped with cameras to record the cockpit displays, but mistakes were made and only one captured real-time footage of the target. Claims are often made that a craft of some kind was detected by the airborne radars that could move from stationary to seven times the speed of sound in seconds. This is a common characteristic of radar UFO reports, along with the fact the pilots saw nothing visually. But as Belgian ufologist Wim van Utrecht discovered,



'SCRAMBLED FOR BOGIES' AN INCIDENT AT RAF SEK KONG



ABOVE LEFT: A de Havilland Vampire of 28 Squadron at RAF Sek Kong in the 1950s. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Sek Kong airfield photographed in the 1980s.

As a young man, Michael Forrest (1931-2018) spent 20 years as a fighter pilot flying Vampire, Meteor and Javelin jet aircraft for the RAF in Europe and the Far East. The strangest experience of his entire life happened in 1954 when he was based at RAF Sek Kong near Hong Kong.

The task given to 28 Squadron was air defence of the British territory against the encircling Chinese forces. One afternoon in October he was scrambled in a de Havilland Vampire single-seater ground attack fighter to intercept a target detected by ground radar approaching from enemy territory.

"The briefing told us the bogey was travelling at very high speed," Michael told me. "It appeared to be the size of an aircraft and it was a continuous trace. It didn't appear and disappear. That's why we had to take a look." Ground control told him that at times it was stationary, but it had "supernatural manoeuvring properties" that included the ability to change direction and height at

fantastic speeds.

Forrest and the pilot of a second Vampire were vectored onto the blip at 30,000ft (9,100m).

"At first it seemed like a normal interception. But when we got near it, into a position where we should have been able to have a visual, there was nothing to see," he said. "This thing had been visible on [ground] radar for quite some time before we arrived, possibly 30 minutes or more. It was slightly worrying to be closing in on something and to hear the rising panic from the controller. He tried several times to get us closer until the two blips merged into one on ground radars. We split away again and again and all the time he was saying, 'It's in front of you, it's behind you!'. He was convinced we were on collision course with it. Remember this was broad daylight and my No 2 tail man, who was behind me, could not see anything either."

After 15 minutes the two aircraft were ordered break off and return home. Back on base he was told that it was 'anaprop', "which was the jargon they

used back then for things they could not explain." (see panel). When I interviewed Forrest in 2006 I asked what he thought it really was. "The entry in my logbook reads: 'Scrambled for bogies: no contact'," he said. "I think it was some sort of anomaly in the radar in the same way you sometimes get reflections inside camera lenses. I am sure unusual weather had something to do with it."

Forrest's description of the blip's odd behaviour resembles the accounts provided by US and British personnel of targets tracked by ground and airborne radars during the famous radar-visual UFO flap at RAF Lakenheath-Bentwaters in August 1956 (see **FT213:28-32**). The Lakenheath case was listed as "probable anaprop" in the Project Blue Book files but later became a *cause célèbre* for ufologists after radar consultant Gordon Thayer described it as "the most puzzling and unusual case in the radar-visual files" for the Colorado University study published in 1969. Thayer said he believed "a mechanical de-

vice of unknown origin" was the most probable explanation. But radar meteorologist Dr David Atlas said Thayer's comments were made before the results of NASA-sponsored research using extremely sensitive radars to probe extremely thin atmospheric echo layers was widely known. These experiments at Wallops Island in Virginia from 1967 identified "incredibly thin, specular reflecting layers like mirrors at high altitudes... that could account for the exceedingly large apparent speeds of echoes either from ground targets or moving vehicles on the ground."

In 2002 Dr Atlas told me: "I am strongly convinced that these mysterious radar echoes are due to anomalous propagation somewhat different than that with which scientists in the 1950s and 1960s were familiar." He believed the large number of UFO radar reports during this period "was due to the lack of knowledge of their origin. Once their origin was explained the frequency of the reports decreased."

the lights in the sky that triggered these scrambles were almost certainly misperceptions of bright stars and planets. The radar evidence was scrutinised by the Belgian Royal Military Academy and their report found at least one of the three 'lock-ons' occurred when one F-16's radar locked onto the second aircraft. Utrecht was told that "at no time during the scramble had [the pilots] witnessed anything unusual, nor were they impressed by the freakish radar blips".¹⁰ The airborne targets did not correlate with the visual sightings and the returns seen

by ground radar were caused by anomalous propagation where radio waves are bent by atmospheric conditions, causing moving objects on the ground like cars and trains to appear as airborne targets.

Modern radars are designed so that computers normally filter out and remove so-called spurious echoes caused by meteorological conditions. But when UFO flaps occur, as in the *USS Princeton* and Belgian cases, military personnel are on high alert for anything unusual, including spurious echoes that might otherwise have been

ignored. In his own account of the Belgian wave, de Brouwer notes that during the flap radar controllers were asked to "pay particular attention to angel echoes" that appeared to corroborate sightings from the ground. "As a result, a number of radar echoes were recorded where it was impossible to know whether they were 'angels' or real aircraft in flight."¹¹

'Angels' were first noticed on crude early radars during the 1940s around the time flying saucers and UFOs became a media obsession (see panel). Air defence systems

FOUR-MINUTE WARNING UFO

During the Cold War the three radome golfballs at RAF Fylingdales on England's North Sea coast became a sinister symbol of the dreaded 'four-minute warning'. This was all the time the British government believed we would have from the moment its radars detected the approach of Soviet ballistic missiles before warheads impacted on their targets.

Today the Soviet Union is just a memory and the golfballs have been replaced by one single powerful phased array radar encased in a three-sided truncated pyramid (pictured below). Yet RAF Fylingdales continues its key role in the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) that links it and sister bases in Alaska and Greenland to the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) bunker deep beneath Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado. In the post-9/11 world new threats and the militarisation of space continue to keep Fylingdales on constant alert for threats from afar. Its radars have a range of 3,000 miles (4,800km) and are unique in having 360 degree of coverage in azimuth. This would *appear* to make them a formidable tool for tracking any UFO that enters Earth's atmosphere; but as Allen Hynek's protégé

Allan Hendry discovered during research for his *UFO Handbook*, NORAD has a narrowly defined defence mission. It exists to guard the route across the Arctic Circle that would be used by any future Russian attack and its radars "are *not* located inland, looking skyward; they're situated along our perimeter looking *outward* to the horizon."

Nevertheless, since Fylingdales began operating in 1965 the UFO grapevine has buzzed with rumours. The most recent was a tabloid story from 1998 that claimed a UFO "as big as a battleship" had been tracked moving at improbable speeds of 17-24,000mph (27-30,000km/h) above the North Sea (see **FT280:29**). Reporting on the story for *The Yorkshire Post*, I was given a tour of the curiously antiquated control room and radar block by the station commander. He said the story was "pure fantasy", because its radars were not configured to track aircraft in Earth's atmosphere. That was "someone else's job," he said, referring to the air defence radars that detect Russian aircraft that play a cat-and-mouse game with NATO fighters above the North Atlantic. In their space-tracking role Fylingdales computers ignore any objects that do not behave like a

rocket launch or man-made satellite in orbit. If an 'uncorrelated target' is detected, its computers search for matches against directories of known missile or satellite launches.

The Ministry



of Defence claims that in its 60 years of operations RAF Fylingdales has never tracked a UFO – but that depends how you define 'UFO'. In 1979 Hendry was told NORAD records between 800 and 900 of what they define as 'uncorrelated targets' (UTCs) every day. However exciting this may sound, this total includes millions of pieces of man-made satellite debris along with meteor trails and auroral pulses, all of which generate 'noise'. He was unable to discover how much of the residue remained 'unexplained' and whether any action was taken to investigate these further. But records of such incidents were not kept for long because storage was expensive and the data "bear little significance to NORAD's military mission".

Hendry's findings help to throw light on a revelation made by RAF Group Captain David Todd, who once worked for the MoD's UFO desk. When I interviewed Todd in 2012, he revealed how on one occasion he ordered a secret inquiry into the source of a mystery object that appeared in Earth's orbit. This happened

in 1981 or 1982 when Todd was Senior Duty Officer at the Yorkshire moors base. He returned to Fylingdales as station commander in the late 1990s and was later promoted to HQ Strike Command, where he was responsible for reviewing UFO reports on behalf of the RAF, liaising with the UFO desk (Nick Pope's former admin branch at Whitehall).

"Unknowns came up on the radars at regular intervals for all sorts of reasons," he told me. "At that time if the radar had sufficient capacity spare, it was told to go track them. That was because we are interested in unknowns and sometimes we needed to find out what it is, where it is and most importantly what it might run into during its orbit such as spy satellites."

"I remember this [incident] particularly clearly. It came up as an unknown and [Fylingdales] radar tracked it. We could not match it up with anything on our computers. And radar tracked it for quite a long time. We had quite a lot of information on it. It appeared to be in Earth's orbit and we waited for it to come

around again but it did not return. So that got us really interested, because people started saying 'Ooh, is it a UFO?'."

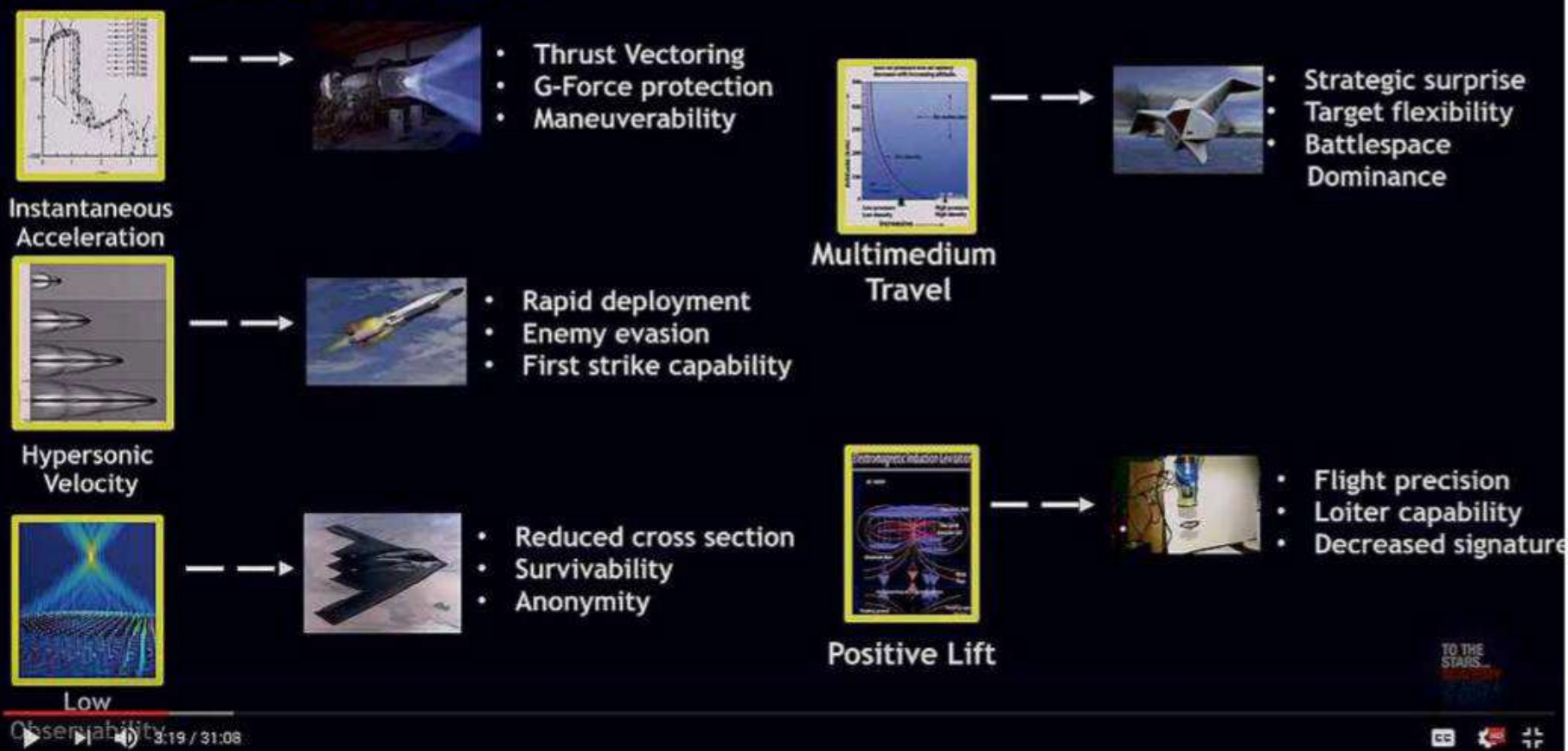
The 'unknown' did not reappear, but Todd decided it could not be ignored so he tasked the defence contractor SERCO, who designed and maintained the radars, to investigate further. "We were duty bound to do so, because this was an unknown object," he said. "They did a hell of a lot of work on it and came up with various theories. One of which was 'an unidentified flying object with little green men inside'. Well you have got to be open minded about this stuff, you can't discount that possibility."

But the ET theory was not taken seriously. "We decided the most likely explanation was a meteorite that was rotating in the same direction as the Earth," he said. "It appeared to be in orbit at the time it was tracked by the radar. I say *appeared to be in orbit* but it probably wasn't in orbit. We decided it skimmed past the Earth and either burned up in the atmosphere or went off again into space and that explains why it didn't come back."

No official record exists of this remarkable incident as far as I can discover. None of this is the result of an overt cover-up but because, as Todd explained, the investigation was never reported to MoD. "It was nothing to do with unidentified flying objects, it wouldn't fall into that category [e.g. of lights in the sky reported by a member of the public]. It fell into the category of something the radar had seen that we could not identify. If we told anyone it would have been HQ Space Command in the USA [Cheyenne Mountain] but no one else would be particularly interested."



AATIP MISSION FOCUS:



BELOW: Luis Elizondo, one-time head of the former US Department of Defense UFO project. **ABOVE:** Elizondo's list of "five observables... uniquely associated with Unidentified Aerial Phenomena or UAPs". Some commentators have stressed that these "observables" are all subject to human interpretation and error.

were plagued with reports of 'angels' and on some well-known occasions these were linked with UFO flaps. But when the source of the radar angels was traced to birds, insects and atmospheric turbulence, military and air traffic systems began to employ computers to eliminate targets that did not behave like aircraft. This fact explains the almost complete dearth of radar-visual UFO reports from the last five decades. In the UK MoD's Condign report, radar scientist Ron Haddow (see **FT396:28-29**) flagged up "a significant absence of radar plots/tracks compared to the larger number of visual sightings reported to MoD". The one event he claimed as possibly significant, from a 1996 flap in East Anglia, has been explained as a false return from a 'permanent echo' – a tall church spire (see panel).

SPURIOUS SIGNALS

Despite these lessons from history, the former head of the former US Department of Defense UFO project, Luis Elizondo, has presented a list of "five observables" that he maintains "are uniquely associated with Unidentified Aerial Phenomena or UAPs". The first of these is sudden and instantaneous acceleration – "objects moving in such a manner that they are capable of manoeuvring suddenly and deliberately... [that] involve a change in direction and acceleration that is well beyond the healthy limitations of any biological system... to withstand".¹² The problem with this and the other four 'observables' is that *all are subject to human interpretation* and are not empirical evidence of anything unknown to science. As Bob Sheaffer has said,



Elizondo's 'five observables' are more accurately called "five assumables".¹³

The idea that military detection of UFOs on radar provides empirical evidence of visitations to Earth by an unknown technology is an attractive one – if it were true. All evidence from radar, along with that provided by other instruments such as infrared cameras, remains subject to interpretation by humans. And when such evidence is placed under withering scrutiny, it often fails to impress the experts who design and use advanced radar systems for military and civilian purposes. As former RAF fighter pilot Michael Forrest remarked, reflecting on an occasion when he tried – and failed – to intercept a UFO detected on radar near Hong Kong (see panel): "Experienced operators learn to know what to believe and what not to believe, but it took time to recognise spurious signals. Even experienced operators could be fooled in exceptional circumstances... That is because these things are so rare, experience didn't always mean anything."

NOTES

1 DoD press release 14 Aug 2020. Previous coverage of the AATIP saga by Peter Brookesmith can be found in **FT363:28-29**; **366:28**, passim. The acronym 'UAP' was adopted by MoD and USAF during the 1990s as military jargon for UFOs.

2 DoD press release 27 Apr 2020.

3 New York *Intelligencer*, 19 Dec 2019: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/12/tic-tac-ufo-video-q-and-a-with-navy-pilot-chad-underwood.html>.

4 FOI releases on the East Coast flap and the Gimbal/GoFast footage were obtained by The Drive/WarZone in May 2020: www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/33371/here-are-the-detailed-ufo-incident-reports-from-navy-pilots-flying-off-the-east-coast.

5 Mick West, 'Explained: New Navy Videos', 27 Apr 2020: www.metabunk.org/threads/explained-new-navy-ufo-videos.11234/

6 Tic-Tac UFO Executive Report, Department of US Navy, 13 pages, undated, FOI release, May 2018.

7 Kenneth R Hardy, 'Unusual Radar Echoes' in *UFOs: A Scientific Debate* (ed. Carl Sagan and Thornton Page) 1972, pp183-89.

8 J Allen Hynek, *The UFO Experience* (1972), pp96-7.

9 Wilfried De Brouwer in Leslie Keen, *UFOs: Generals, pilots and government officials go on the record* (2010), p24-40

10 Wim van Utrecht, 'The Belgian 1989-90 UFO Wave' in *UFOs 1947-97* (ed Hilary Evans and Dennis Stacy), 1997, John Brown Publishing.

11 MOD file UFOs: Defence Policy Issues Part 1, 1992-96, FOI release.

12 'Five Characteristics Unique to UFOs' 16 Feb 2018, <https://invest.tothestarsacademy>.

13 Bob Sheaffer, 'The Pentagon's UFOs', *The Skeptic*: www.skeptic.com/reading_room/pentagon-ufo-to-the-stars-academy-ttsa-ufo-media-frenzy/

♦ **DR DAVID CLARKE** is an Associate Professor at Sheffield Hallam University, a consultant for The National Archives UFO project and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*.

LEIBNIZ AND THE FLYING MONK

Did one of the major thinkers of the Enlightenment really meet the celebrated levitating monk St Joseph of Copertino? And did his witnessing of Joseph's miraculous flights cause Leibniz to convert to Catholicism? **BOB RICKARD** looks at the evidence and asks 'What If?'

I have always enjoyed the alternative time-line genre of 'What if?'. Factual and fictional speculation on such crucial issues as 'what if' Kennedy had lived beyond 1963? What if Socrates died at the Battle of Potidaea in 432 BC? What if Charlemagne had failed to destroy the Saxon *Irmensul* at Eresburg in 772? Or the Apostles had failed to establish Christianity? And so on.

Some time ago I came across a curious allegation that at around the time Isaac Newton (1643-1727) was researching gravitation, Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) – Newton's closest rival – had travelled to Italy to see for himself a levitation by St Joseph of Cupertino. ¹ Simon Young joked with me that this seems to be a happy bit of wishful dreaming: "One of the heroes of the Enlightenment coming face to face with the representative of, let's say, another world order."

Search online and you can find a few scattered allusions to this idea, and many sites appear to repeat this sentence (with small variations): "Johann Friedrich, Duke of Brunswick, a Lutheran and patron to philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, was so impressed by the sight that he converted to Catholicism." ²

This is substantially correct; but it is perfectly feasible to suppose that a careless reading might give the impression that it was both men, or Leibniz alone, who "converted to Catholicism". Either way, the idea was out there long before it appeared on the Internet. ³

THE IDEA

I first came across a more explicit version of this notion in a short science fiction story of dark humour by the late John Sladek (1937-2000), first published in 1982. In it, a rather unstable character rants: "I learned that levitating persons were common enough in the past, before Newton. The



Leibniz's patron visited Assisi in 1650 and did meet St Joseph

last authenticated case was the celebrated 'flying monk', Joseph Copertino, who flew in front of hundreds of witnesses. Leibniz travelled to Apulia to see him fly. Copertino went on flying all his life, and even made a last, feeble levitation from his death-bed, on 18th September, 1663. That was the exact day when Newton, at Cambridge, commenced his infamous calculations... Man would fly no more, declared Newton. Man

LEFT: Leibniz in a line engraving of 1768. FACING PAGE: Saint Joseph of Copertino is seen levitating in an engraving by GA Lorenzini.

would see no more. His optical laws were to put out our eyes, as his gravity nailed us to the ground." ⁴

Sladek was a satirist, so we cannot rely on his deadpan prose as factual. However, a more serious statement of the idea had appeared in Marcello Truzzi's pioneering sceptical journal *Zetetic Scholar* four years earlier, in 1978. In a book review, Laurent Beauregard, a teacher of philosophy and physics at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, wrote: "It was at about the time that Isaac Newton first conceived of the universal law of gravitation that the flying monk was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church because of his saintliness and his levitations. And Leibniz – who is said to have witnessed one of the monk's flights – actually thought that there was something profoundly 'occult' – that was the word that was used – about the Newtonian concept of gravitation, a concept which involved instantaneous action-at-a-distance." ⁵

That same year, Geoffrey Ashe – a historian of Arthurian and Marian legends – refers to it more precisely in his book *Miracles*. Among the many hundreds of witnesses to St Joseph's elevations, he writes, "was the future mathematician and philosopher Leibniz." ⁶ There was no clue as to where Ashe's information came from.

Dr Robert Labanti (responding to my request for help) reminded me that there was a brief allusion to Leibniz in the *Encyclopedia of the Unexplained: Magic, Occultism and Parapsychology*, edited by historian Richard Cavendish and published in 1975. Here – around five years before Sladek's usage and three before Beauregard's – is the assertion that St Joseph's "levitations were witnessed by a



host of eminent persons, kings, prelates, and professors, *including the philosopher Leibniz.*" (My emphasis.) The article had been written by Benjamin Walker ⁷, a diplomat and well-known authority on Hinduism; but like Ashe, he provided no reference.

In the same year as Beauregard's reference, 1978, *The People's Almanac*, edited by Wallace and Wallechinsky, referred to Cavendish's *Encyclopedia of the Unexplained*, apparently excited by this factoid about Leibniz.

Here, the trail peters out. It is conceivable that Sladek (who was certainly well-read in fiction and anomalous phenomena) and Beauregard (as a well-read sceptic) could have come across the idea in Cavendish's *Encyclopedia*, because that sold well and widely; but I have not been able to track it any nearer to its origin.

IS IT TRUE?

The image of the great mathematician Leibniz bunking off to see St Joseph's soarings for himself is certainly a provocative notion of the 'what if?' type; but is it true? Unfortunately for fans of 'alternative history', it can be quickly discredited.

Leibniz's only opportunity to visit Assisi would have been between 1687 and 1690, when he toured Germany and Austria before ending up in Italy. But by then, St Joseph had been dead for 27 years. On the other hand, it is well-recorded that Leibniz's patron – Prince John-Frederick of Brunswick – visited Assisi in 1650 and did indeed meet St Joseph over a few days and witnessed several elevations by the saint, which converted him to Catholicism. The Duke's visit took place when Leibniz was barely four years old, and

19 years before he joined the Duke's employ.

What about Sladek's assertion that St Joseph made a last, "feeble" levitation on his death-bed? In the closest account of his death – as recorded by direct testimony of the doctors and companions that surrounded St Joseph in the hours leading to that final moment ⁸ – there was no mention of levitation; only ecstasy and a radiance in his face. And, as for Beauregard's 'factoid' that St Joseph was canonised "about the time" Newton was working on his gravitation theory, he was wide of the mark. The saint's canonisation took place in 1753, some 26 years after Newton's death.

THE DUKE'S CONVERSION

It remains to describe the scene at the heart of this discussion. Accounts of the Duke's conversion in his biographies are singularly discreet. The most verbose one I have found – in a life of Sophia, who became Electress when she married the Duke's brother Ernest, and who, herself, was the sole heir to the vacant English throne – simply mentions that "in February, 1651, Duke John Frederick was... at Assisi received into the Catholic Church" ⁹ with no mention of the remarkable events that provoked it.

The writer makes no mention at all of the Duke's impulse to see St Joseph's 'miracles' for himself the previous year; but this is not surprising. The entire drama takes place against the religious and political fallout from the forced conversion of Catholics by Europe's ruling German Protestant (Lutheran) regimes. It simply would not 'look good' if one of their own had defected so dramatically.

Nor was the Duke's conversion improbable. Those who knew him say that he "had a natural interest in religious matters". Ward's dynastic history fills in a few of the blanks. Duke Frederick was occasionally "possessed by an ardent ambition... to think out his own salvation".

While he was in Rome in 1650, the Duke took an interest in the conversion of the Imperial Count Christopher von Rantzau (1625-1696). It had been induced by the German philologist Lucas Holstenius, himself an "eminent convert and convert-maker", who headed the Vatican Library at that time.

Up to this point, the conversion was known only to his family and entourage; but the silence following the Duke's encounter with St Joseph in 1650 was not without drama. This idyll ended when Frederick's elder brothers sent commissioners to Rome "to dissuade [him] from" going public. The Duke frustrated them by choosing that moment to out himself.

WHAT THE DUKE SAW

Where biographic details are sparse about the Duke's conversion, the hagiographic discussion about St Joseph's part in it is comparatively voluminous. My summary (below) is mainly from Sir William Crookes ¹⁰ who derived it directly from the Latin of the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*. ¹¹

In 1650 [12], St Joseph was at the monastery of his Franciscan order's founder, in Assisi; and Prince Johann-Friedrich (John-Frederick) of Brunswick was on a European tour, accompanied by two Counts (one a Catholic and the other Lutheran Protestant). At the age of 25, Frederick (1625-1679) was the heir to either of the Protestant states of Brunswick or Hanover, whichever might first fall vacant, and he afterward succeeded to both. When he reached Rome, he heard tales of the "the wonderful monk", and he seized the opportunity to make the four-hour journey north to Assisi. According to Crookes, who was fascinated by the story, the Duke arrived there "on a Saturday, begging one interview with Friar Joseph, and intending to depart the same day".

Crookes notes that, despite the great distrust between Catholics and Lutherans at that time, the Duke was, nevertheless, quickly and diplomatically accommodated by Franciscans. The company was prevented any sight of St Joseph at first, but the Prince was resolved to stay until he could see a miracle. On the second day (Sunday): "The superior... introduced [them] by a secret door into the chapel where [St Joseph], uninformed that any stranger was present, had to perform Mass. As had been expected, an impressive part of the service overcame the speaker, he became unconscious, and, as frequently happened in these trances, rose and floated some time in the air."

At this point in the Mass – as recorded in the biography by Domenico Bernini, son of the famous sculptor ¹³ – a startling detail: "Giuseppe [Joseph] began to wail, gave a great scream, and then *flew into the air backward in a kneeling position*. [My emphasis.] St Joseph then returned to the altar where he remained in ecstasy for some time." ¹⁴

"Questioned afterwards by the superior, but still unaware that strangers were listening, he could only tell that he had fainted; that before the swoon he had been trying in vain to break the holy wafer; that afterwards he broke it, but with difficulty." ¹⁵

On the third day (Monday): "Joseph, while elevating the host, again swooned, and was seen to rise following it, and remained suspended with his knees and feet one palm (or by another account a foot) from the floor; while the clear face of the wafer, visible throughout so small a chapel, became marked with a cross of jet-black... The friar, in an insensible state, yet holding up the monstrance over his head, hung immovable in the air an eighth part of an hour."

There and then, the Duke solemnly promised to believe "all that the Catholic Church believes". About a year later, when the affairs of state allowed him, Frederick revisited Assisi, and fell to his knees "before



LEFT: Prince Johann-Friedrich of Brunswick, by Johann Hulsman.

“He flew into the air backward and in a kneeling position”

two cardinals and Friar Joseph”.

After this, the friar successively relocated to increasingly secluded mountain convents, to avoid the increasing crowds of worshippers. Before long, he was forbidden to perform Masses publicly. One of the most significant features of the story of St Joseph is that, unlike so many other cases in Christian hagiography, important documentation was made soon after his death by people who knew and lived with him and written within living memory. Pastrovicchi's biography (see also note 13) included a statement from the Duke's widow vouching for the facts. ¹⁶

A 'WHAT IF?' MOMENT

Crookes was intrigued by the political implications of the Duke's conversion. Could the powers-that-be have miscalculated in backing Frederick? Crookes suggested that the Catholic Church might have been better served if Frederick's younger brother, Prince Ernest (1692-1698), had been converted instead. "Whatever power or intelligence superintended those miracles, [it] showed great ignorance of the future. No conversion could seem more important to the interests of Catholicism than that of [Frederick's]...

It appeared that any other ruler would have had more permanent influence, [because] all the Prince's pious dispositions absolutely ended with his life [and] all his states passed, for want of a son, to his Protestant brother, Ernest Augustus, father of George I," which had historical consequences across the continent. ¹⁷

Like his older brother Frederick, Prince Ernest was also on his travels around Europe "and of similar education and disposition". "Plainly," mused Crookes, "if the power directing the Assisi miracles could have looked forward but a few years, not [to the] heir-apparent, but [to] his younger brother, [Ernest's] conversion, though not then looking so important, would, in all present probability, have recovered to Rome a great part of Germany."

Referring to the English monarchy, Crookes wrote: "What dynasty England might have chosen is of course impossible to guess ¹⁸ but his posterity would not, by being Catholic, have been excluded from any of the continental thrones they have actually filled."

While Leibniz's contribution to science, mathematics and philosophy is widely recognised, his Duke's conversion stirred something within him. He was certainly a rationalist, once saying: "I prefer a Leeuwenhoek who tells me what he sees, to a Cartesian who tells me what he thinks." It is a matter of record that almost as soon as he took up his employment, in 1676, as librarian and archivist to the House of Brunswick, Leibniz began work, inventing the chocolate biscuit ¹⁹ and bringing about a reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants ²⁰ ... as well as hatching an even more ambitious plan to convert the Chinese by using some sort of binary rhetoric based upon the *Yi Jing*... ²¹

Thanks to Robert Labanti and Simon Young for their helpful comments; and especially to Michael Grosso who kindly supplied me with a digitised copy of Pastrovicchi. An early version of this was a discussion on Academia.edu, 22 April 2020.

NOTES

1 Giuseppe da Copertino was born Giuseppe Desa in 1603. His aerial flights – and frequent ecstasies, to which he had been subject from the age of eight – continued, the former to his last year, and the latter to his last day, in 1663, at the Osima monastery. Olivier Leroy, *Levitation* (1928) ch6, pp89-102. I will refer to 'St Joseph' throughout, even though the events under discussion happened *before* he was canonised. For discussion of the primary sources of St Joseph's life, see the 'Appendix' to Michael Grosso, *The Man who could Fly* (2016); and 'Appendix: Chapter 1' of Eric Dingwall, *Some Human Oddities...* (1962), pp162-171, especially p167.

2 The repetition of this sentence on many different



LEFT: St Joseph in full flight.

sites could indicate that it is was lazily copied from an encyclopaedia entry of some sort. I have not yet identified its original source.

3 There have been many references to St Joseph's levitations in fiction, including depictions in at least two films. While *The Reluctant Saint* (1962), starring Maximilian Schell, made gentle fun of the saint's clumsiness and childlike innocence, its scene of levitation is quite sombre and minimal. In stark contrast, the depiction of the saint hovering happily in mid-air above excited onlookers near the beginning of *More than a Miracle* (1967), starring Omar Sharif and Sophia Loren, is one of the more impressive portrayals of the surreality of levitation.

4 John Sladek, 'An Explanation for the Disappearance of the Moon', in the anthology *The Lunatics of Terra* (Gollancz, 1984, pp146-147).

5 Laurent Beaugard, 'Review of 'Dark Side of

Knowledge' by A Shadowitz & P Walsh (1976), in *Zetetic Scholar* (1978) vol.1, no.2, pp127-131.

6 Geoffrey Ashe, *Miracles* (RKP, 1978), p68.

7 Benjamin Walker, 'Physical Powers', in *The Encyclopedia of the Unexplained: Magic, Occultism and Parapsychology* (1975) p195.

8 St Joseph's last levitation was on 17 September 1663, "one day before his death". (Leroy, op. cit., p101, citing Pastrovicchi.)

9 Adolphus William Ward, *The Electress Sophia and the Hanoverian Succession* (Longmans Green, London, 1909) p154f.

10 See the *Vita* of St Joseph in the *Acta Sanctorum*, vol. 5 of September, p1002, A-F; p1024, 43-44. For extracts see extensive passages in Thurston and Leroy, and also in Alban Butler, 'St Joseph of Cupertino', in *Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints*

(1883) pp480-482.

11 'Human Levitation: Illustrating Certain Historical Miracles.', Being Item 3 in *The Quarterly Journal of Science, and Annals of Mining, Metallurgy, Engineering, Industrial Arts, Manufactures, and Technology*. Vol. V. (New Series), January 1875, pp31-61. Although the article was anonymous, it was by the QJS's editor Sir William Crookes, FRS.

12 One of the saint's biographers, Pastrovicchi, gives 1649; but historical and critical evidence confirms the date as 1650. As Leroy notes (*op. cit.*, p170), the *Acta Sanctorum Vita* is largely drawn from Robert Nuti's account. Nuti knew Joseph personally and began in the year of the saint's death collecting testimonials from other living witnesses, where Pastrovicchi's account was published 90 years *after* Joseph's death and is more an anthology of official documents.

13 Michael Grosso, *Wings of Ecstasy: Domenico Bernini's Vita of St. Joseph of Copertino* (1722) pp119-125. Privately printed 2017. This is a fresh translation by Cynthia Clough, edited by and with a commentary by Michael Grosso. See also Michael Grosso, *The Man who could Fly* (2016), pp82-84.

14 This backward flight is unprecedented in the annals of Christian levitation. Although elevations while kneeling are rare in Christian hagiography, this backward flight adds additional significance to the account of the Duke's conversion. Grosso, *Wings of Ecstasy*, p.83.

15 The Duke, startled by Joseph's "great scream", asked for an explanation. Joseph tried to explain his struggle with the wafer and sudden faint. He told of having such feelings before, when he felt the presence nearby of "some hard-hearted heretic". Unknown to him, among the witnesses was the Lutheran Count who had complained to the Duke's company that: "It was a cursed day that I came into Italy. At home I always enjoyed a quiet mind; but in this country, puzzles about faith and conscience keep pursuing me." This doubter was Henry Julius Blume, who barely three years later, was himself converted to Catholicism. Andreas Raess, *Die Convertiten seit der Reformation*, vol.6 (Herder, Freiburg, 1868) pp450-452, 558-571.

16 In 1668, Johann Friedrich married Benedicte Henriette (1652-1730) of the Palatinate, a Bavarian princess. In his introduction, Pastrovicchi wrote: "Her most Serene Highness of Brunswick is still alive while we are writing this book... Frederico her Husband, did nothing but speak of the servant of God, Father Fra Giuseppe da Copertino, to whom he kept a very tender devotion, and he had an Effigy." This is my translation from the Italian cited by Crookes (p60), but he doesn't state which edition of Pastrovicchi's *Compendio della vita... del B. Giuseppe di Cupertino* he consulted – Rome, 1753, or Osimo, 1804.

17 Crookes, op. cit., pp.60-61.

18 The Duke's younger brother Ernest was the father of George I, the first British monarch of the House of Hanover (which rebranded as the House of Windsor just after WWI due to anti-German sentiment).

19 I'm only half jesting: see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leibniz-Keks>.

20 See a discussion of this at <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09134b.htm>.

21 See Frank J Swetz, 'Leibniz, the Yijing, and the Religious Conversion of the Chinese', in *Mathematics Magazine*, vol.76, no.4 (Oct, 2003), pp276-291.

➡ **BOB RICKARD** started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on forteana and strange phenomena.

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The weirdest ghosts of all?

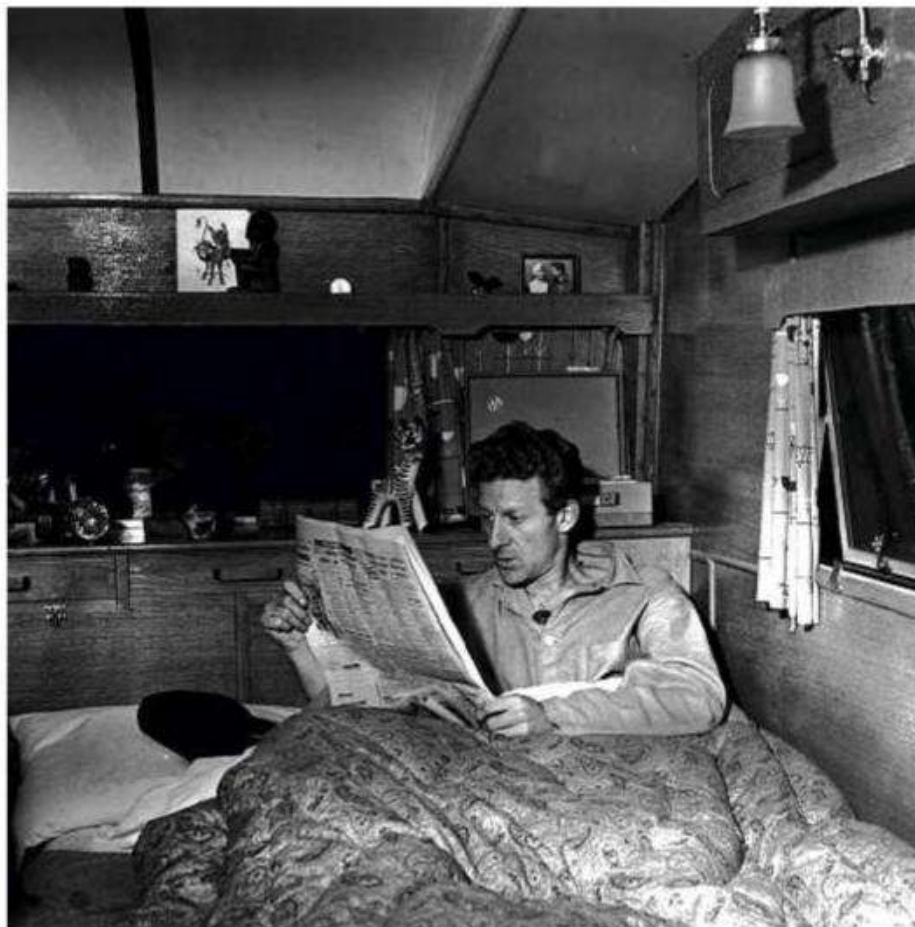
RICHARD FREEMAN picks a couple of his all-time favourite examples of outré apparitions and surreal spooks...

According to Jennifer Westwood in her 1985 book *Albion, a Guide to Legendary Britain*, Walshes Road, Jarvis Brook, in Crowborough, East Sussex, is haunted by a ghostly bag of soot. This horrific phantom supposedly attacks anyone who sees it; just what it would do if it caught you, other than dirty your suit, is another matter.

This got me thinking about some very odd cases of what we might call surreal ghosts, and wondering just what was the strangest phantom ever reported. In the pages of *Fortean Times* readers have encountered a poltergeist mongoose and undead chickens, but there are ghosts even more obscure and absurd. These entities are so very odd that they fly in the face of the idea that ghosts are simply spirits of the dead.

Actor Jon Pertwee, of *Doctor Who* fame, had a childhood encounter stranger than anything he met while playing his best-known role, an experience recorded by Richard Davis in his 1979 book *I've Seen a Ghost*.

As a small boy Pertwee used to go and stay with a schoolfriend in an Elizabethan manor house in Sussex. The family lived in one wing, and the rest of the house was not widely used except when they were giving parties. There was also a dining area with a minstrels' gallery running around it. Leading off the gallery was another room, used as a bedroom. On this particular occasion, Jon was asked if he minded sleeping in this room as all the others were full during the holiday season. He distinctly recalled his friend's father saying "Do you think that's wise?" The mother replied: "Oh yes, that's all



ABOVE: A young Jon Pertwee spent a couple of harrowing nights sleeping in an Elizabethan manor house in Sussex.

right, he's a sound sleeper."

On the first night Jon awoke feeling an awful nausea and proceeded to vomit on the bedclothes. Dreadfully embarrassed, he cleaned the sheets as best he could with water and hung them up to dry. In the morning he told his hosts he had slept well.

The following night he found out just what had made him so ill:

The next night I went to bed again and again I woke up and this time I was able to realise what had made me sick. In the room there was the most overpowering smell of putrefying flesh – it was exactly like a dead sheep, and it permeated the room.

I shot up out of bed and again felt violently sick. I looked up and about four feet from the end of my bed was a thing I can only describe as a sort of tree trunk. It was a light greenish colour and it undulated, and as far as I could see it bubbled: it seemed to have bubbles that blew up at the side of it and didn't burst exactly but disappeared. This thing was moving very, very slowly towards me.

The 'thing' frightened Jon so badly he wet the bed and ran down the gallery to the wing where the others were staying. While being comforted by his friend's mother, he heard her husband say: "You see, we should never have put him in there."

On asking his friend about it he was told that other people had seen the thing and the family never put a guest in the room. They had rashly assumed a young boy would be a deep sleeper and would not be awoken by the thing. He never did find out what the crawling, glowing, bubbling, stinking tree stump was.

I could tell you a story concerning a haunted lamp post, but perhaps the weirdest of all phantoms on record is the case of a giant, floating, ghostly crab that was recorded in 19th century South Africa. The story appears in a book called *They Walk in The Night: True South African Ghost Stories and Tales of the Supernormal* by Eric Rosenthal (1949). This is the tale,

taken verbatim from pp124-125:

Here is a tale set down by Mr CH Basson, an eyewitness of what went on in the home of Mr J van Jaarsveld of Haartebeest River in the district of Uniondale shortly after the Jameson Raid.

It appeared in the daily paper 'Dagblad', of Cape Town, as follows:

"In consequence of what he heard, he went to the farm of a Mr van Jaarsveld. Shortly after sunset, the spook commenced his pranks and certain noises were heard coming out of a chest. The spook seemed especially attracted to Mr van Jaarsveld and his niece, Miss Mayer. Whenever the latter dared to take a seat on the chest, she was moved about and the chest moved also.

"But the most weird thing of all," proceeded Mr Basson, "happened at nighttime. Miss Meyer went to lie down. We blew out the candle, but no sooner had this been done than she called out to us to light it again. We did so and lo! The spook had, during the few seconds that the candle was extinguished, tied her hair firmly to the bedpost. We untied it and plaited her hair into one tress, tied it at the end with a firm knot and made her lie down again. We then ranged ourselves round her bed, each with a box of matches in his hand. The candle was blown out again. Immediately afterwards, she cried out that the ghost was tugging at her hair. We all struck a match and found that one strand of the plait had been twisted out and tied as firmly as ever to her bedpost. Three of those present were able to see the spook. They say it resembled a phosphorescent crab with two huge pincers. They saw it 'floating' about the room touching here and there. On a former occasion it assumed the form of a skeleton hand with two fingers."

A floating phosphorescent crab? I think that must be the weirdest ghost ever – unless you know otherwise.

♦ RICHARD FREEMAN is a cryptozoologist, author, zoological journalist, and zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology.

Sifting the debris of Roswell

As a new series returns to the subject of the Roswell saucer crash, **NIGEL WATSON** talks to ex-CIA man turned saucer sleuth Ben Smith and asks whether it's possible to discover anything new after so many years.

Roswell is the ufological equivalent of a black hole. It is so strong that no ufologist can escape its powerful embrace and its ability to distort our sense of space, time and reality.

Ben Smith, a former CIA operative and science fiction writer, in a new six-part TV series *Roswell: The First Witness*, is the latest explorer to plunge into this ufological maelstrom. What I wanted to know was whether he had uncovered any new evidence.

"Well, we have a journal written by Major Jesse Marcel (of the 509th Bomb Group Intelligence Office) among his military documents and other prized possessions that he passed to his children. It clearly has an unusual sub-text or even encryption."

As far as I'm aware, the journal quotes from *Reader's Digest* and song titles, so I ask Ben what deeper meanings it might have.

"As an intelligence officer, Jesse could have been trying to hide information in plain sight, especially if there was a chance somebody could turn your house over and look through your stuff. Obviously, you would want to protect sensitive information that you wanted to remember. For most of the journal's contents, like you said, it's the *Reader's Digest*, jokes, little idioms that are funny and kind of clever; but right at the period of Roswell you see a marked shift in handwriting style and content – the quotes are a little more serious. I would categorise it



LEFT: Former CIA operative Ben Smith examines Major Marcel's journal.

BELOW: Archæologist Esperanza Juarez examines soil samples at the Roswell site for radiation traces.

as a little bit more erratic. It shows some kind of stress and deliberate care in crafting the letters. Then a bit later on it turns back to the original handwriting style and stream of consciousness. So that three or four month period of strange handwriting is a huge flag for me that something interesting is going on here."

Was this due to the stress of being unwittingly part of a Roswell cover-up when he was photographed with the weather balloon wreckage at Fort Worth and made to look foolish?

"There is speculation there that I can't make. I did my best to work with a handwriting authenticator and expert in forgery called Jennifer Naso. She could not tell

"We know there is a lot of debris that others claim to have retrieved"

me whether this reflected some mental state changes – she could only authenticate the handwriting itself. As an intelligence officer, I can personally see some kind of stress. Regarding the other evidence of the famous photos of Jesse Marcel and General Roger Ramey in his office at Fort Worth, we got some body language experts who were able to confirm some

communication cues that I had missed: that here is a man under stress, who had been posed for a cover story. All that seemed to track with his claims of this being a government cover-up. His view was 'I was a poster boy for something that I think is a lie.' In the context of his journal, then, it does seem to suggest he was definitely under stress."

Roswell is a complex case and it is difficult to identify any firm evidence to support the eyewitness testimonies and rumours. So had Ben found anything concrete at the actual site of the incident?

"I come at this question as an agnostic. I believe that it is possible that aliens do probably exist and may have come here, but I need hard evidence to get there. So our investigation focused on that evidence. At the debris field it's windy, there are limestone sinkholes all over the place, and there is dust. We know there was a lot of debris that others claim to have retrieved. Our efforts were to see if we could track that down. We used the best technology and latest technology, to see if there was a crash here. Could we determine an





ABOVE LEFT: Archaeologist Bill Doleman reviews Roswell images as Ben Smith looks on. ABOVE RIGHT: Major Jesse A Marcel holding foil debris from Roswell in 1947.

impact? Could we find any debris? And, can we also find any evidence of a government cover-up, like bulldozer tracks, a soldier's camp, something to mark that there was a large-scale clean-up here of the kind some witnesses described."

I ask him if he believes, as has sometimes been suggested, that there were actually two crash sites, the second containing more substantial wreckage and alien bodies.

"We did explore that in the third episode. We take into consideration other accounts describing a second impact site. I found that a bit harder to sink my teeth into. It also shifted efforts to validate Jesse Marcel's story. I find his account, and the accounts by Mack Brazel, the rancher who originally found the debris, and Captain Sheridan Cavitt who accompanied Marcel to collect the debris, to be the most compelling: it is consistent and we have newspaper accounts about it. It was something we could directly address."¹

So was it was a weather balloon?

"I find Mack Brazel's witness statements impeccable: he said it was *not* a weather balloon. He had seen weather balloons before. So that is pretty fascinating, but I was not able to find any of the debris that he did, the allegedly unbreakable metal and flame-resistant material, or memory metal. But I found it compelling and I have not found any evidence to disprove it."²

I ask him if there was, perhaps, a cover-up to hide Project Mogul – the secret high-altitude balloon project designed to monitor Soviet atomic bomb testing or other secret activities – from the Soviets as much as from the American public?"

"Absolutely, and that is probably my first base-line assumption. This was probably some kind of atmospheric testing equipment or experimental aircraft, missile technology... or maybe a nuclear bomb fell off the back of a plane. In 1947 I think the US government is aware of Soviet espionage in this area, so it becomes a serious issue of national security.

"Was it a weather balloon or the Project Mogul listening device? Well, it's a compelling argument, but there are flaws in it. We bring out experts in episodes two and three who are crash investigators to tease out details of these different competing theories. We did get hit hard by the pandemic, we did uncover some intriguing data to suggest there is still something out there, but the pandemic stopped us getting out there again and we did not have time to explore the site more deeply. But, I think there is something there to be found for sure."

What does he think happened to the original debris?"

"If you believe in the 1995 report from the Air Force, and the witnesses at the time, it was boxed

up and carted to Wright Patterson Air Force Base. From there it disappeared and was perhaps burned in a warehouse fire that occurred in the 1950s. That is totally plausible, as we did not at that time have agencies to look after or track this stuff. So it was possible that it got lost and buried.

"As for the other part of your question, if you want the story to go away or you want to hide the story from the Soviets, you don't want to attract attention to it. So why the announcement of 'We have a flying disc'? That's a really bad cover story and is the opposite to what you needed to do. Was this a mistake by someone, like the base commander Colonel William Blanchard, whose transparency then got overruled by commanders in Washington?"

I suggest to Ben that we are looking at the case from our own historical perspective. There were a lot of things going on in that period: flying saucers had only just appeared in the headlines, and perhaps they got over excited by the possibility they had actually captured one. It was described as a 'disc' yet all the debris was of tin foil-like material. It is now hard to know what was going on in the minds of the people acting there. Did he get the chance to speak to witnesses and the people of Roswell about their thoughts on the matter?

"Yes, one of the best parts of the investigation was going to Roswell and the old town of Corona. We

spoke to new witnesses who have never been interviewed before and they confirmed the details of Jesse Marcel's story. But I do worry that UFOs have become such a big part of pop culture that it has overwritten people's memories. Is this life imitating art or art imitating life?"

I ask what conclusions, if any, he draws from making the documentary.

"Regarding Jesse Marcel's story, I believe he was telling the truth as he knew it. Our investigation was the most thorough forensically and there are indications there might be something there that could prove it was either a spacecraft or a balloon. I would love to go back there and find out more..."

NOTES

1 Counterintelligence officer Cavitt always stuck to the weather balloon explanation.

2 Ben notes that we have to accept there are discrepancies in the witness testimonies. Jesse never said the debris consisted of unbreakable metal, but that it was more like lightweight balsa wood, and he disputed his son's claim that he saw purple I-beams. Mack Brazel's daughter said she saw the debris, but later recanted her statement.

Roswell: The First Witness continues on Sky History on Tuesday 2 March at 9pm and is available on catch-up.

◆ NIGEL WATSON is the author of *Captured by Aliens? A History and Analysis of American Abduction Claims* (McFarland, 2020) and *UFOs of the First World War* (History Press 2015).

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Not always Brotherly on the square

Chris Hill explores two highly readable accounts of the history of Freemasonry and its involvement in society around the world, both for good and for bad

The Craft

How Freemasons Made the Modern World

John Dickie

Hodder & Stoughton 2020

Hb, 454pp, £25, ISBN 9781473658196

The Secret Temple

Masons, Mysteries and the Founding of America (2nd edn)

Peter Levenda

Ibis Press 2020

Pb, 286pp, \$21.95, ISBN 9780892541881

The Craft offers the reader a highly readable survey of Freemasonry from its origins in Scotland to its expression across the globe; its manifold rites, degrees, and personalities – quite an achievement!

Beginning in the mediæval period, Dickie considers the existence of the “Old Charges” – a written code of practice for stonemasons – to be the origin of what became Freemasonry. William Schaw formalised proceedings in 1598 after gathering Scotland’s elite masons together and securing their approval to establish a secret fraternity. Dickie foregrounds the role of early masonry in preserving the scientific gains of the Renaissance through “the art of memory” and the familiar degree system. As it migrated south to London, he notes, its ranks grew as it provided a forum for new ideas at a time of increasing authoritarianism and burgeoning civil war.

As the Craft went from strength to strength throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Scotland’s greatest export became co-opted by the English establishment and its Hibernian roots obscured. Dickie tackles this phase of masonic growth and the demarcation of its historical and mythological narratives in detail

along with its arrival in continental Europe. Incorporating major events such as the Great Fire of 1666 and the French Revolution into a broader account of the period allows Dickie plenty of scope to contextualise the growing political significance of masonry and profile such notables as Christopher Wren and Isaac Newton and the infamous founder of the Hellfire Club, Philip Wharton.

With an English Grand Lodge established in 1717, French masonry followed suit with the Grand Orient in 1773, as did the Craft in the Americas. By the end of the 18th century, masonry had become embedded throughout the colonial world, the first Indian citizen undergoing initiation in 1775. Dickie makes much of the contradictory nature of masonry in this expansionary phase



by considering how the reintroduction of the Scottish rites appealed to establishment thinkers and social radicals alike. Accommodating such diverse personalities as Voltaire, Joseph Guillotine, George Washington, Rudyard Kipling and Motilal Nehru, let alone Count Cagliostro and Casanova, masonry was viewed by many with great suspicion.

The history of masonry is not without its shadows. In documenting the Craft’s domination by the aristocracy during its formative period one is not surprised to learn that it remained far from egalitarian. Regardless of the increasingly bizarre degrees that were introduced over the decades and the assimilation of esoteric ideas, it frequently

The sects practised alchemical medicine, blood-letting and pseudo-masonic initiation rites

remained at the behest of unpalatable ideologies. Whether seen in Prince Hall’s black masonry that countered the incipient racism of American lodges, or its manipulation by the protean Nazi movement, it was perceived, by many, as less than benign. Dickie’s history succinctly incorporates an appraisal of anti-masonic rhetoric and he achieves a skilful balance throughout. His comical accounts of the 18th- and 19th-century scandalmongers Charles de Beaumont and Léo Taxil, for example, do not detract from his indictment of General Franco’s policy of murder and persecution and the Italian P2 lodge’s complicity in the murder of Roberto Calvi in 1982.

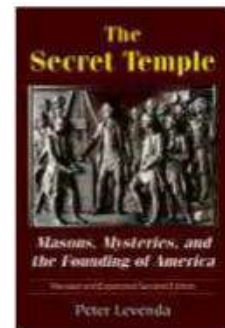
For the general and specialist reader alike, a concise and scholarly account.

Taking a chronological approach, *The Secret Temple* cogently documents a complex narrative of American masonry in its pre- and post-colonial phases. The pre-revolutionary landscape is dominated by the émigré Rosicrucian thinkers Johannes Kelpius and Conrad Beissel and their mysterious sects, the Ephrata Community and the Zionitic Brotherhood. Both based in Pennsylvania, they espoused secrecy and practised alchemical medicine, blood-letting and pseudo-masonic initiation rites. Following the death of Beissel in 1708 the community dwindled and became assimilated into

Seventh-day Adventism.

By the 18th century we see masonry as embodied by the forefathers of the American state, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Paul Revere, normalise its presence within politics and reify its affiliation to European doctrines of freedom and brotherhood. Not the case however, for African Americans who remained outside of the interests of the newly established lodges. Ironically, the abolitionist Prince Hall, who established the first African Lodge in Boston in 1784, was granted a charter by the colonial forces so despised by the revolutionaries.

The onset of the Civil War did little to remedy the masonic problem of race. Under the guidance of Grand Master Albert Pike, bigot and racist, brotherhood seemed a forgotten ideal



as the nation was polarised over rights and representation. The 19th century also saw the emergence of the “first American religion”, Mormonism. Levenda does justice to the bizarre hotch-potch of angelology, masonic ritual and prophecy that defined the life of visionary and initiate Joseph Smith; he looks at the emergence of an anti-sect rhetoric following the murder of masonic whistleblower William Morgan, former husband of one of Smith’s wives.

With new material on Skull & Bones, P2 and the death of Che Guevara, this second edition is an excellent companion to *The Craft*, and Levenda proves himself a highly entertaining writer.

The Craft ★★★★★

The Secret Temple ★★★★★

Wondrous sea creatures

Karl Shuker praises a compendious collection of aquatic cryptids

Monsters of the Deep

Nick Redfern

Visible Ink Press 2020

Pb, 366 pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781578597055

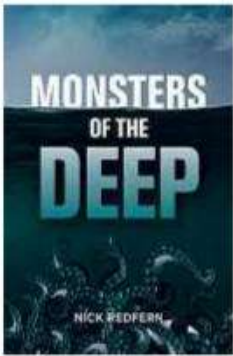
Nick Redfern has devoted his life to investigating and documenting a vast range of mysteries and inexplicabilia. This is readily demonstrated not only by his prolific output of articles and books but also by their very diverse nature, of which this book is a particularly apposite example.

None of the many books devoted to aquatic mystery beasts covers as wide a range of examples as this one. In addition to such true-blue corporeal cryptids as the expected Nessie-type freshwater and marine monsters, the several additional sea serpent categories proposed by veteran cryptozoologist Dr Bernard Heuvelmans, a sundry assortment of tentacled terrors, various swamp-dwelling tropical behemoths deemed by some to be living non-avian dinosaurs, and even a selection of sewer-dwelling, tunnel-terrorising, and cryptic cave-dwelling critters (not to mention reports of swimming Bigfoots!), Redfern also focuses attention upon such (semi-?)mythological entities as mer-folk, dragons, and “Creature From the Black Lagoon”-type reptilian humanoids, plus various ostensibly paranormal beings like aquatic deities and water spirits, and even extraterrestrial aliens.

Cryptozoological purists may already be blanching. But it has always seemed contentious to draw an inflexible dividing line between anomalous aquatic life forms that are definitively flesh-and-blood and those that are putatively otherwise. There are, for instance, many well-documented but still-unexplained

reports alluding to reputed mer-folk carcasses – and not the infamously fraudulent Feejee mermaids and similar man-made composites seen even today in travelling side-shows and “freak” roadside attractions – so how should these be classified, factual or fabulous?

Equally, whereas many cryptozoologists confine themselves to considering strictly zoological identities for aquatic mystery beasts, Redfern has never been afraid of thinking outside the crypto-box, exploring both mainstream and non-mainstream possibilities in relation to such creatures. All of these approaches are actively pursued by him



in this book. He presents a substantial quantity of cases, analysing familiar and unfamiliar ones alike, having dredged up from the depths of the anomaly archives and extracted from his own original researches some particularly

intriguing, hitherto-obscure examples that I guarantee you will not find documented elsewhere. His writing style is as easily digestible and deft as ever, ably supplemented throughout by interesting, relevant b/w photographs, plus a decent bibliography and index – the latter being extremely welcome in a book as packed full of named cryptid examples as this one.

In summary, not only have I been thoroughly entertained and educated reading this fine work, but also I finally possess in a single, readily-navigable volume a detailed coverage of what must surely be the entire spectrum of animate aquatic anomalies and enigmas presently on file. That alone makes this book a unique publication, quite unlike any previous offering on its title subject – monsters of the deep.

★★★★★

Life in the Victorian Asylum

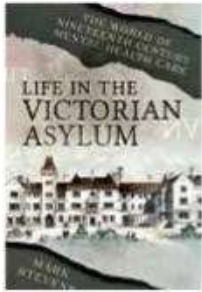
The World of 19th-Century Mental Health Care

Mark Stevens

Pen & Sword 2020

Pb, 192pp, £11.99, ISBN 9781526782090

The image conjured by the phrase “Victorian lunatic asylum” is one of dark, disreputable pandemonium and mistreatment. Mark Stevens is one of many historians who have set out to uncover the truth behind this popular perception, and through this book he outlines what life was really like for those who lived and worked in these infamous institutions.



As an archivist, Stevens is well acquainted with the records relating to historical mental hospitals. Building upon his earlier work *Broadmoor Revealed*, and using the surviving material from the Moultsford Asylum in Berkshire, he presents the day-to-day experience of a typical Victorian lunatic institution.

The book aims to immerse the reader in the 19th-century mental health care system, both from the perspective of the patients and through a general lens of a wider history of the topic. Uniquely, the first section, “The Victorian Asylum’s Patient Handbook” addresses the reader as though they were entering the institution themselves and describes their upcoming journey through the expected treatments and daily regime. There’s also a chapter giving direct guidance to the patient’s friends and family. Whilst this is something of a gimmick and is slightly misleading, as individuals wouldn’t be led through asylum life in such an instructive manner, the book provides a wealth of information to those completely new to the history of mental health care, and addresses some of the popular misconceptions.

The second section is set out in a more conventional manner, and the author does well to condense over 200 years of history of mental health services in Britain into a small number of chapters. Using the example of Moultsford, he demonstrates what it took to build an asylum, and what

happened in the 20th century to dismantle the network of lunatic institutions.

Stevens’s immersive take on the Victorian lunatic asylum is a great sensory experience for newcomers to the topic, and does well to counteract the darkened perceptions surrounding these establishments. The use of real patient examples brings the reader closer to those who lived through this period in such a universally feared setting. What the book lacks is a broader context; for instance, the journey of the patient, their treatment and diagnosis, could benefit from a larger engagement with contemporary alienists and the development of the wider field of psychiatry. On the whole, though, a good introduction to the Victorian lunatic asylum, with the added advantage of some great contemporary illustrations.

Cara Dobbing

★★★★

Has Archaeology Buried the Bible?

William G Drever

Eerdmans 2020

Hb, 160pp, £20.99, ISBN 9780802877635

Armed with crude science and religious zeal, the early Victorian archaeologists headed for the Holy Land determined to unearth the evidence that would prove the Bible was a factually accurate historical document. All they needed to find was some clinching piece of evidence like the flattened walls of Jericho!

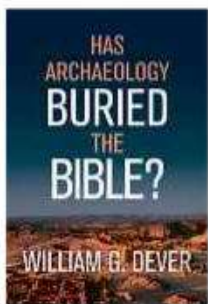
Well into the 20th century there were American teams digging away with the aim of demonstrating, by science, that the main stories of the Old Testament were literally true: that Moses led an Exodus from Egypt, that there was evidence of their desert wanderings and conquest of the land flowing with milk and honey. For if the facts didn’t stand up, then the religious faiths, both Judaism and Christianity, based on these stories fell apart. In 1933 one enthusiast even exclaimed that every find by archaeologists confirmed scripture and confounded its enemies.

However, as scientific methods advanced, one by one the claims of irrefutable proof were overturned. Then along came sceptics who, influenced by late 20th-century post-modernism, claimed



that nothing in the Bible would or could ever be proved. There are no facts, only interpretations and conjectures.

In *Has Archaeology Buried the Bible?* William Drever searches for the middle way between two opposed positions. Prof Drever is an anthropologist who has spent 30 years working in the field as an archaeologist in the Near East. If the Bible is read with a critical and well-stocked mind and through the eyes of faith, he concludes, archaeology is an invaluable asset, but perhaps not in the way the Victorians hoped.



What modern archaeology appears to show is not that specific biblical events can be proven, but that the descriptions of life in the Iron Age Middle East, in which the events of the Hebrew scriptures are set, is backed up by the archaeology. While the Bible focuses on the founding myths of a specific group of people, the Israelites, the region at the time was home to a number of tribal groups each of which had their own religious practices – and there's a lot of evidence from these to be discovered. If once it was thought that the description of King Solomon's temple was fanciful, today there is evidence that it was one of at least a dozen such religious buildings built to a similar tripartite design, probably used as royal chapels.

There is corroborative evidence that David was a real person and not a kind of mythical King Arthur figure, although the biblical stories of Kings Saul, David and Solomon may be tall tales. Equally significant is that the archaeology confirms much of the detail of biblical accounts of life in Old Testament times. Excavations at one royal palace discovered hewn stones and ivory inlays as described by the prophet Amos in his railing against the idle rich of Samaria.

Drever has, perhaps unwittingly, written a rather fortean book. He is rightly wary of orthodoxies and seeks understanding in the balance between proven facts, legend and faith.

Ted Harrison
★★★★

Gentlemen Rogues and Wicked Ladies

A Guide to British Highwaymen & Highwaywomen

Fiona McDonald

History Press 2020

Pb, 224pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780750994675

Though discussing a fascinating topic where historical evidence and romantic myth-making battle to create a stereotype owing considerably more to the latter than the former, this book only offers an entry-level survey of the material. First published in 2012, it consists of short biographies of the criminals in question with details drawn largely from the Newgate Calendar, proceedings from the Old Bailey and contemporary pamphlets. The introduction mentions these documents but as the individual accounts offer no reference to specific sources, the reader cannot judge how the narratives might be shaped by the nature of the original records.

Fair enough; this is not an academic work, but even as light reading it rambles from one (very) brief life to another, alphabetically rather than chronologically, revealing an inevitable list of similarities. The two main variants involve rich boys who go wrong or poor lads attracted to an easy life of ready money. They fall in with a bad crowd, often engaging in house-breaking en route to a career on the highway. The worst ones rape, maim and kill, while more sympathetic examples display a degree of panache and consideration.



Among anecdotal episodes reading as though concocted by pamphleteers (or perpetrators who lingered long enough to write their own histories) interesting details of social history do emerge. Legitimate trades range from soldiering to becoming a grocer, soap-maker or “doctor of smoking chimneys” and things worth stealing include not just cash and jewels but shirts, mutton, butter and human hair (sold to a wig-maker.)

Time not on the road is usually spent in gambling, drinking and fraud, including Claude Duval's convincing impersonation of an alchemist. Duval (1643–70) comes closest to the popular dashing

ideal, who will dance with a lady as soon as rob her, while Dick Turpin emerges as a psychopathic bully.

Despite the title, female highwaypersons were rare, and the author admits that fact cannot be disentangled from legend in the career of Katherine Ferrers, the original Wicked Lady. Better documented is the life of petty thief Mary Bryce, recaptured after her escape from transportation to Botany Bay but eventually pardoned following a campaign by James Boswell; fascinating, especially her recent elevation to heroic status, but you might discover more from her Wikipedia entry.

Illustrations by the author are vague sketches from unnamed sources (Duval's bizarre pose only making sense if you recognise the wholly idealised Victorian painting it derives from). And unless you count the odd final repentance, the sordid repetition of deaths on the gallows can't even offer any happy endings to justify the jaunty authorial tone.

Gail-Nina Anderson

★★

The End of Everything

(Astrophysically Speaking)

Katie Mack

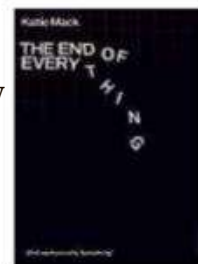
Allen Lane 2020

Hb, 226pp, £20, ISBN 9780241372333

Eschatology is the study of the End Times, and of the inevitable destruction of humanity. This is no longer a purely philosophical pursuit: we can now employ the power of science to predict what lies ahead for our species, and for the Universe itself.

Will the fabric of reality fold in upon us, collapsing under the gravitational pull of supermassive black holes? Or will our very subatomic particles rip themselves asunder, leaving an inert and silent void in which even time has no meaning?

Katie Mack (@AstroKatie) is a famous face of cosmology and astrophysics on social media. A minimal background in science is assumed here; you should find her central thread easy enough



to follow.

Mack's writing style, clearly informed by her experience of harsh online character limits, is commendably direct and breathlessly enthusiastic. It becomes a little disconcerting when she starts shouting in CAPITALS, but that happens infrequently enough to just about be endearing. Indeed, the cheery tone goes some way to offset the relentlessly bleak nature of her findings.

The text kicks off with a whistle-stop recap of the history of the Universe from the Big Bang to the present day, and then pitches into the advanced weirdness of its annihilation. There is much for forteans to enjoy: collisions between parallel dimensions, disembodied consciousnesses floating freely between the stars and invisible vacuum bubbles of alternative physics intent on obliterating space itself.

Mack weighs up the evidence for and against each flavour of potential apocalypse, carefully highlighting the doubt in the data and the scope of future research. She speaks to established experts and younger mavericks on the cutting edge, plus we get a short myth-busting visit to the Large Hadron Collider on the Swiss border. Spoiler alert: she gives short shrift to any suggestion our end will be triggered by the experiments conducted there.

More likely, as Mack consistently points out, the Universe will end not by human intervention, but by some fatal flaw that occurred right at its creation, a terminal birth defect that leads inexorably to one of the five main scenarios (Big Crunch, Heat Death, Big Rip, Vacuum Decay or Bounce) that she explores in depth. It is the study of the Universe's beginnings, she contends, that will eventually reveal which fate awaits us.

This is a fairly short book. Ruthlessly edited, there is scarce repetition or any autobiographical fat. In fact, we are left wanting a bit more on the charismatic author's backstory, which could perhaps be expanded upon in a future edition. This is a strong debut, and the impression given is of a new and confident voice in science communication entering the stage. We can only hope that more books and perhaps television beckon for AstroKatie.

Ryan Shirlow
★★★★

A failure of foretelling

David Hambling finds that a survey of methods of prediction is too shallow and misses out far too much of importance

Seeing Into The Future

A Short History of Prediction

Martin Van Creveld

Reaktion Books Books 2020

Hb, 296pp, £17, ISBN 9781789142297

Seeing Into The Future looks at prediction in all its forms, exploring the different methods through the ages and whether we have got any better at foretelling the future. There is no overarching structure; rather it divides prediction into 19 chapter-sized bites, each covering one technique. The first section looks at ancient prediction methods, so we have one chapter on prophets, one on precognitive dreams, necromancy, astrology, numerology, omens and so on. The second and much shorter part looks at ideas of cycles in history, polling, linear projection and modelling and, slightly surprisingly, a long chapter on wargames.

Van Creveld only touches briefly on why prediction is so difficult in his summing-up at the end, covering chaos theory and the uncertainty principle in a paragraph each. The technicalities are not his major concern, as he prefers to be a wry observer on the pageant of human folly.

He is equally unimpressed with 17th-century soothsayer Lady Eleanor, who correctly anticipated the death of the Duke of Buckingham but ended up in a madhouse, and modern opinion polls like the one that predicted victory for Hilary Clinton in 2016. He sees computer models as status symbols which exist mainly to increase their users' prestige and "prevent the layman from realising how uncertain much of the forecasters' knowledge really is".

He describes the various methods of prediction in more or less depth, occasionally dumping sections of undigested historical

text, but not checking too deeply into how accurate they were. His approach can be broad and casual. For example, he takes the fact that President Reagan's wife Nancy was interested in astrology in the 1980s as a sign that "to this day there are countries whose leaders consult astrologers on a more or less regular basis" – even though Reagan ceased to be president more than three decades ago, and clearly did not consult astrologers himself on a regular or any other basis.

A decade or two ago this division into segments would have been a safe way to write a book, but now there is competition from the Internet, and in particular the compendious group mind that is Wikipedia. If you write a chapter on astrology, you need to bring something to it better than Wikipedia's tirelessly busy bees.

Van Creveld is a history professor, a specialist in military history, hence the chapter on wargames, which cannibalises some of his previous work. But for the rest of it he may not be well placed to deal with a field that is esoteric at the ancient end and technical in the modern era.

For example, he suggests that the process of programming computers to make predictions has changed hardly at all in the century and a half since Charles Babbage's time; his reference points to a 2012 article which makes the opposite point to what he is arguing. Perhaps more importantly, the emergence of AI and in particular deep learning techniques means that many of the more advanced systems are not "programmed" at all in the traditional sense but learn for themselves, often in ways not anticipated by their human creators. Van Creveld, however is dismissive of machines "made of

dead matter".

Gaps are to be expected, but some are glaring. Science fiction, a forward-looking genre that has attempted to see the future since the days of Jules Verne, does not get a chapter, but is condemned as largely boring: "instead of having characters use bullets to slay monsters and kill one another here on Earth, writers have them use all kind of mysterious rays to do the same in interplanetary and intergalactic space. Big deal." Van Creveld may not be a great reader of SF. The *I Ching*, one of the oldest and most widely-used methods of divination, does not get a mention. Neither does the entire field of futurology, which surely would make an entertaining chapter. Insurance, a huge industry based on prediction, is mentioned in passing. Weather forecasting, a type of prediction that most people use on a daily basis and which has a fascinating history – there was laughter in the House of Commons when it was first suggested that the government should put money into scientific weather prediction – is barely mentioned.

Perhaps the biggest issue of the current era is climate change. The whole debate hinges on the accuracy or otherwise of the models which track the remorseless rise in temperature with carbon dioxide increase. The battle between believers and sceptics will determine what happens for the rest of this century – but goes unmentioned.

Van Creveld surprisingly concludes that with regard to phenomena governed by the laws of physics, the answer to the question of whether we have become better at prediction is "a resounding yes". And yet two pages later he says "a science of the future is as far away as it has ever been". He does not support either claim.

Seeing into the future is a fascinating topic; this book barely claws at its surface.

★ ★

Storyworlds of Robin Hood

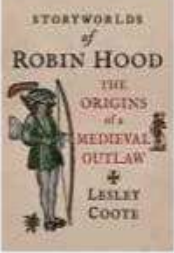
The Origins of a Mediæval Outlaw

Lesley Coote

Reaktion Books 2020

Hb, 304pp, £20, ISBN 9781789142327

Robin Hood is one of the most popular and versatile figures of mediæval English literature. Generations of writers have reinterpreted him as a charitable thief, an anti-authoritarian rebel, a freedom fighter for the oppressed English and a mediæval mob boss. But what were the earliest elements of his tales, and where did they come from? Lesley Coote examines the mediæval literature of Robin Hood and related genres that provided some of the components of its "storyworld".



She dispels some of the preconceptions readers might have. The very earliest stories, she notes, portray a character who doesn't rob from the rich to give to the poor, love Maid Marian or even live in Sherwood Forest. She summarises the early literature of Robin Hood, from mediæval manuscript sources to early printed works. Viewing Robin Hood as a storyworld – a set of related elements from which authors created varied narratives – allows her to explore the origin of different ingredients in that mixture, such as Robin's devotion to the Virgin Mary and his relationship with Maid Marian.

She covers contemporary genres – romance narratives, trickster stories and comic tales – identifying the ways in which these overlap with Robin's adventures, and looks at how the stories continued to evolve in the post-mediæval period.

This book is fascinating reading for anyone interested in Robin Hood as a cultural phenomenon. Rather than attempting to reconstruct some kind of "authentic" or "original" Robin Hood, Coote approaches the outlaw as the product of an ever-developing combination of influences that result in a character so "outward-facing, community-based and fun (while also being spiritually and morally beneficial)" that he has survived for centuries in changing but still recognisable form.

James Holloway

★ ★ ★ ★



SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

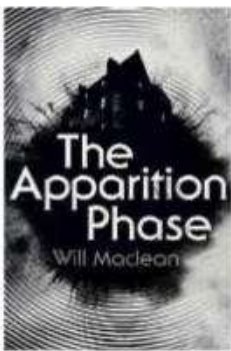
DAVID V BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

The Apparition Phase

Will Maclean

William Heinemann 2020
Hb, 406pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781785152375

We all know that *Fortean Times* is inspirational – and it’s inspired three very different novels. First, directly influenced by Bob Fischer’s article “The Haunted Generation” (FT354:30-37), Will Maclean’s *The Apparition Phase* is an extraordinarily powerful account of growing up in the Seventies. Teenage twins Tim and Abi love all things weird; the attic where they spend much of their time is filled with books on ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. But when they fake a photo of a ghost to scare a fellow pupil, have they created (or released) a real and malevolent supernatural power? No spoilers to the plot; just to say that Tim and Abi’s enthusiasm for the weird is wonderfully infectious, and the séance scenes later in the book are truly hairs-on-the-back-of-the-neck stuff. But most of all, Maclean has captured the feel of the Seventies impeccably. This book is a must for anyone touched by hauntology.



The Lamplighters

Emma Stonex

Picador 2021
Hb, 368pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781529047318

In 1998, Mike Dash wrote a long paper in *Fortean Studies 4* about three lighthouse keepers disappearing from a remote rock light in the Outer Hebrides in 1900; in FT352:40-44 he wrote more about the story. Emma Stonex read one or both of these and was intrigued. She’s moved the story to Cornwall and to 1972, but the heart of the mystery remains the same: what happened to the three men? The table is laid for a meal – but only for two. Both clocks in the lighthouse have stopped at the same time. The principal keeper’s log records a storm, though no storm happened. And the door is locked from the inside. It’s a locked-room mystery; it’s the *Mary*

Celeste. The men disappeared and were never found. Twenty years later a novelist starts investigating the story by interviewing the wives and girlfriend of the three men; the narrative switches between his interviews and the claustrophobic lives of the three lighthouse men on duty around Christmas 1972. As the novel progresses we see various possible explanations playing out as the backgrounds of the men and the relationships between them are gradually revealed. *The Lamplighters* is a beautifully written novel, both poetic and haunting.

The Stranger Times

CK McDonnell

Bantam 2021
Hb, 432pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781787633353

CK McDonnell is a former stand-up comedian, now a novelist and, according to his publisher, “quite a big fan” of *Fortean Times*, on which *The Stranger Times* is clearly based. There are some major differences, though: rather than a four-weekly colour magazine, *The Stranger Times* is a small weekly newspaper produced in a former church in a scruffy bit of Manchester, edited by an unkempt and drunken Irishman who sleeps in his office and swears at his staff! It’s Hannah’s first week on the paper, and with no journalistic experience she’s effectively become deputy editor, trying to create some sort of order out of the chaos which seems to be the normal state of the paper and quickly becoming a safety barrier between the editor and the rest of the staff. *The Stranger Times*, like *FT*, has a policy of reporting accounts of weird stuff happening, while not necessarily believing in ghosts or UFOs itself. But then some weird stuff starts happening very close to home, as Hannah and the others get dragged into a gruesome supernatural battle... It’s dark and at times scary, but it’s also a comic novel. The humour is more



slapstick than subtle, and often too drawn out – but the novel gets better as it goes along, and becomes a thoroughly enjoyable read. It’s the first in a series; I look forward to engaging with this disparate crew of offbeat journalists in future books.

Hypnotwist/Scarlet by Starlight

Gilbert Hernandez

Fantagraphics 2021
Hb, 100pp, £22.99, ISBN 9781683962045

In its early days, the *Love and Rockets* comic often had SF or fantasy elements to its stories. Over the decades, it’s tended to become more realistic, but the two graphic novellas in the latest book – back-to-back like the old Ace doubles – are anything but mundane. Both continue Gilbert Hernandez’s series of comic-book renderings of B-movies starring former therapist Fritz, half-sister of Luba, the focus of his earlier work. In the silent movie *Hypnotwist*, a young woman’s ordinary life becomes utterly surreal after she puts on a pair of glittery high-heeled shoes. In a bewildering kaleidoscope of nightmare images of sex and violence she passes through floors and ceilings and encounters, amongst others, disturbingly alive smiley-faces, a dwarf and two haggard versions of herself, one

a street drunk, the other an elderly woman being tormented in a pit... In the other story, *Scarlet by Starlight*, three scientists are performing experiments in some unknown land. The local life includes two “primitive” groups, the sub-human “pinkies” and a family of

peaceful and beautiful cat-like humanoids the scientists name Crimson and Scarlet, whose children help out carrying things in the lab. When one of the scientists starts a sexual relationship with Scarlet, the comfortable coexistence between species is shattered. This is a deeply disturbing parable of the perennial clash between so-called civilised, advanced cultures and exploited indigenous peoples.

Forbidden Fruits: An Occult Novel

Joscelyn Godwin & Guido Mina di Sospiro

Inner Traditions 2020
Pb, 282pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781644111574

Forbidden Fruits is an occult thriller set in Malta and Rome. An American archaeologist, Monica Bettlheim, working with billionaire Sebastian Pinto, a knight of the Order of Malta, finds a millennia-old golden pomegranate on the seabed – and inside it, the remains of vegetable matter, probably a cereal, and fungal spores. She gets together with Pinto’s son; the occult part of the novel is about them using psychotropic substances – ergot and mushrooms – to experience communion with the divine. That would be fascinating, except it’s completely buried in an over-written thriller whose murderous plot becomes less and less credible as the story goes on and written with clichéd characterisation and clumsy conversation. One of the authors, Prof Joscelyn Godwin, is a highly respected authority on esoteric beliefs and musicology; I’ve had several of his excellent books for years. It’s a shame he’s lent his name to this overblown novel.

Serpentine

Philip Pullman

Penguin 2020
Hb, 74pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780241475249

While we’re waiting for the third book in Philip Pullman’s “Dust” trilogy, he’s released a short story whose hand-written manuscript he auctioned for the National Theatre 16 years ago. *Serpentine* relates a brief episode when the relationship between Lyra and her daemon Pan is beginning to break down, as a prelude to *The Secret Commonwealth*, where they’re barely talking to each other. It’s an interesting little interlude, but with very little text on the pages and illustrations on every other page, this is a very short story, around 4,000 words; completists will probably be happy to pay £7.99 for this slim offering, but I suspect most fans of “His Dark Materials” will wait for the next full-length novel.

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Digging deep

The story of the Sutton Hoo excavations makes for a fascinating historical drama complete with convincing Suffolk accents – even if it does strip the narrative of its more fortean aspects



The Dig

Dir Simon Stone, UK 2021
Streaming on Netflix

This retelling of the Sutton Hoo excavation is shorn of any of its fortean elements (see **FT390:72-75** if you're interested in those), with the possible exception of the extraordinary abilities of self-taught freelance archaeologist, astronomer and polymath Basil Brown (played by Ralph Fiennes) who admits, "I've always had a thirst for learning."

Brown could apparently tell just from the look and the smell of earth from anywhere in Suffolk who its owner was. He was one of those archaeologists who had an uncanny 'nose' for 'walking' a site and by some strange intuition picking exactly the right spot to dig. Although according to *The Dig*, part of Brown's secret is his ability to change his mind. After being briefly buried alive by a collapsing heap of spoil early in his first attempt, he decides another mound that shows signs of a "robber's flute" – a graverobber's trench – might not

Brown had an uncanny nose for picking exactly the right spot to dig

be all that it seems; he goes for that one and literally strikes gold.

Brown's mystique is heightened by his poker-faced, canny East Anglian reticence. The film opens with his first meeting with Edith Pretty (Carey Mulligan), the owner of the Sutton Hoo estate who calls him in to excavate its mounds. It doesn't go well. Brown cycles away after Pretty proposes the same day rate she's learnt Brown gets from Ipswich Museum curator Guy Maynard. Brown's reply is just: "Well, he don't pay me enough..."

The Dig is an adaption of an historical novel of the same name by John Preston (he also co-wrote the script). Some elements are pure fiction – Brown's live burial probably never occurred, while Pretty's dashing cousin Rory

Lomax (Johnny Flynn), brought in to provide a love interest, is definitely made up. The scene where a Spitfire crashes into the river and Lomax tries to save the drowned pilot is another fabrication; for starters, you can't see your hand in front of your face in the murky brown peaty waters of the real Deben estuary.

The romance between archaeologist Peggy Piggott (John Preston's aunt, played by Lily James) and Lomax is also fictional; so no outdoor naked trysts at dawn in the open air, tastefully lit by the Suffolk sunrise – not in that part of the world, brrr! This love interest does build on the documented fact that all was not well with husband-and-wife archaeologist team Stuart and Peggy Piggott, who in real life divorced a year later as their marriage wasn't consummated.

Enthusiasts of fortean iconoclastic disrespect for academic authority will love the film's bucketfuls of snobbery showered onto Brown by the mainstream archaeological establishment.

This is represented by Ipswich Museum (there's a running joke about their contemporary "more important" Roman villa excavation, long since vanished into obscurity), the British Museum, the Ministry of Works and by the Cambridge University archaeology mafia, personified by awful sharp-elbowed bully Charles Phillips who takes over the site (played by Ken Stott; Inspector Rebus and Balin from *The Hobbit*).

The power struggle over the artefacts culminates in Brown hiding them in boxes under Pretty's bed, whisked away from the British Museum's possession at the last minute, awaiting a coroner's inquest. This coincides with the story breaking in the press – a routine drive to the inquest for Brown and Pretty turns into a sudden media scrum.

An unexpected star of *The Dig* is Ralph Fiennes's faultless Suffolk accent, and that of Monica Dolan, who plays his wife May – from whose dialogue we even get an example of the now rare Suffolk dialect "Do you..." imperative.

The film's other surprise star is the big Suffolk sky – that spectacular, slightly dreamy East Anglian light, especially at the end of an early autumn day on the picture-postcard Deben estuary. It's the perfect lighting, just the right side of bleak, for this dramatisation of a gently-paced story that happens mostly outdoors.

The relaxed pace of *The Dig* gives extra power to the occasional moments of drama – Brown's desperate bike ride to the ferry to reach Ipswich Museum before closing time to excitedly show them his find of rusty iron ship's rivets, as well as the moment when several excavators suddenly start turning up gold artefacts.

Any story set in the summer of 1939, with the dig interrupted by



the announcement of World War II, could easily have turned into an over-the-top orgy of sumptuous British costume drama, but the “eve of war” stuff here is nicely understated. The film ends with Brown filling in the burial mound again, with the treasures of what remains England’s greatest archaeological find already placed in emergency wartime storage in a London Underground tunnel, not to be seen by the public for another nine years. I found myself immediately wanting to see it all over again.

Matt Salusbury



What Lies Below

Dir Braden R Duemmler, US 2020
On Digital Platforms from 22 February

Libby returns from summer camp to find that her mum has a new boyfriend. At first excited by the handsome stranger, Libby quickly learns that there is something quite literally fishy about her stepdad to be. *What Lies Below* is a film that revels in clichés, with the generic title and set-up telling you everything you need to know. The cabin in the woods by the lake, the evil new partner and the suspicious teen all point to Point Horror; or, with the atmospherically lit cellar lab and inhuman father figure, a more appropriate genre touchstone might be the Goosebumps book *Stay Out of the Basement*. However, rather than being a problem, there is something incredibly comforting in the familiarity of all these elements. It helps that the actors are having fun – there is a nice mother/daughter dynamic between Ema Horvath as Libby and Mena Suvari as her besotted mum, while Trey Tucker’s performance as the cuckoo in the nest is pleasingly uncanny. Writer/director Braden R Duemmler makes a virtue of the limited number of actors and locations. The use of real, delightfully disgusting lampreys is a neat substitute for the lack of creature effects, and praise should be heaped on Jimmy Jung Lu’s photography, which makes it all look lovely. This film might be a well-worn monster, but you won’t regret welcoming it into your home.

Martin Parsons



THE REVEREND’S REVIEW

FT’s resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

Demons/Demons 2

Dir Lamberto Bava, Italy 1985/1986
Arrow Video, £59.99 (Blu-ray limited edition)

976-EVIL

Dir Robert Englund, US 1988
Eureka Classics, £17.99 (Blu-ray)

Demons blew my tiny mind when I first saw it (aged, ahem, 12). Sure, I’d seen horror films before, but this thing was a *rollercoaster*. Decades later, the struts may creak a little but, wow, it is still a relentless, energetic and most of all aggressive thrill ride.

The concept is simple: gleefully homicidal demons trap an audience in a cinema, and every slimy bite or wet scratch flips the odds in the fiends’ favour. This has everything: gore – the blood-soaked scalping is particularly repellent; kickass monster design – I’d be genuinely terrified to meet that Rosemary demon in a toilet; nightmarish surrealism – a gloopy mutant climbs out of a woman’s spine like it ain’t no thing. It’s got unforgettable imagery, like the poster shot of demons running down a corridor, eyes glowing. There’s a fabulous music score, plus a bunch of hit Eighties songs thrown in for good measure (though when the criminal drug gang turn their car stereo way up, I did not expect the signifier of hardcore delinquency to be... ‘Go West’).

It even has a ‘postmodern subtext’ if you want to write a thesis on it. All that meta-narrative, film-within-a-film stuff: you see, the audience watches the demons on screen before life imitates art and the viewers become the demons themselves. It’s like *Gogglebox*. It’s also got a superbly quotable hero character in Tony ‘the Pimp’. He’s such a strong leader, that



Life imitates art and the viewers become demons themselves

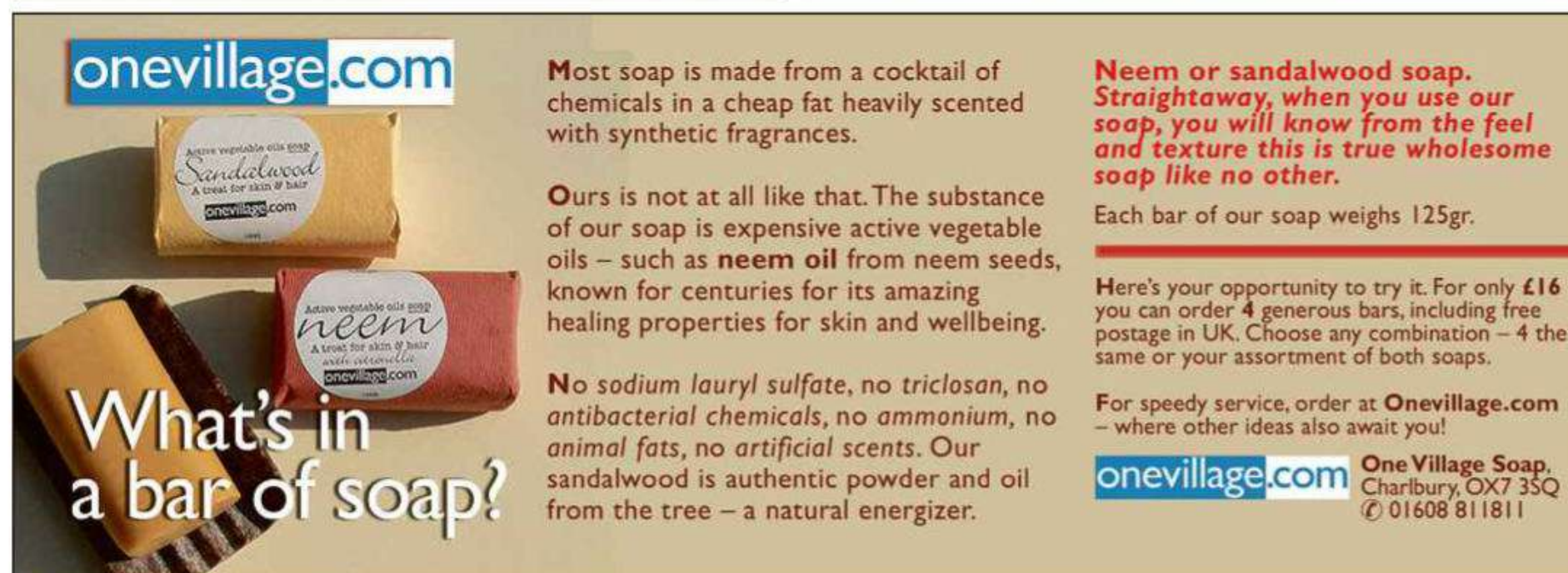
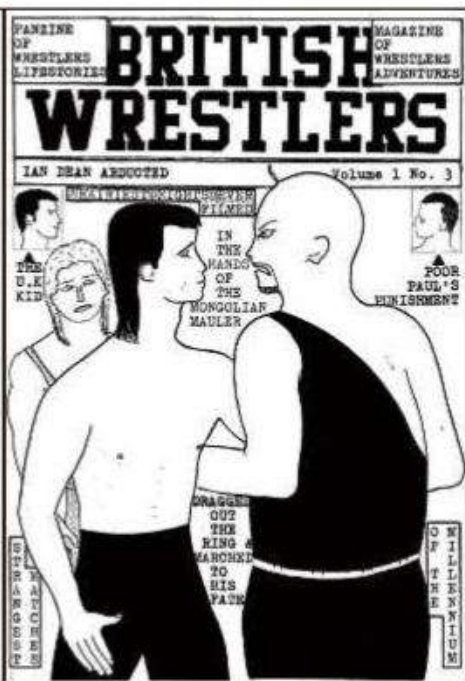
when he shouted “Smash everything”, I almost stamped on my phone in obedience. Tony (played by Bobby Rhodes) proved such a great addition that he somehow turns up again in the sequel.

This time, the demons invade an Eighties-tastic high-rise where creatures fight humans suspended in lift shafts and a cuddly dog turns into a hellhound after lapping up acidic demon bile. So, yes, it has its

moments, but it also overcooks the camp and undercooks the nastiness. The ending also lacks the sheer “Say whaaat?” power of the original. Still, brought together in this beautiful 4K Package from Arrow, the two films make for a seriously entertaining double bill. Yet, it’s the original that makes me want to get straight back into the queue and ride again.

Let’s sneak another little demon in, with the Blu ray release of *976-EVIL*. This bully-revenge tale centres on ‘trendy at the time’ phone-in lines. These were the days when Eighties teens were racking up their parents bills calling sex or astrology lines; but Hoax, an awkward and rejected school nerd, calls a Horror-Scope line instead. In return, he gets access to the infernal, vengeful power of Hell. It was a premium number after all. This was Robert Englund’s directorial debut, the actor best known for turning child-killer Freddy Krueger into a global, mainstream icon (think about that). He directs with an off-beat eye and peppers the film with cinema references. Yet he sadly succumbs to the tiresome Freddy-style one-liners too: After some moggies eat a woman, for example: “Cat got your tongue?” After he kills two card playing punks: “Would it be possible to enter the game... with a pair of hearts.” Guess what he hands over? Badum tish! Despite the groaning puns, there’s enough eccentricity to make the film stand out, even if the central demon seems modelled on pop star Michael Jackson.





A photograph of a small, brown and white kitten with severe skin lesions, likely a feline herpesvirus infection, being held by a person's hand. The kitten's face and front paws are covered in extensive, crusting, and ulcerated lesions. The kitten is sitting on a dark surface, and a person's hand is visible at the top left, supporting its head.

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Mini aliens

Dennis Lien [FT388:70] gave instances of size discrepancies between alien species, leading to unexpected results. I immediately thought of two more examples: Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: "The mighty ships tore across the empty wastes of space and finally dived screaming on to the first planet they came across – which happened to be the Earth – where due to a terrible miscalculation of scale the entire battle fleet was accidentally swallowed by a small dog."

And a recent TV advert for Thinkbox in the UK involved a threatening warlord of a battle fleet appearing on the world's TV's shouting unintelligible but threatening words at the population. The warlord lands his mighty space battleship... only for it to be run over and squashed by the Land Rover wheel of a UFO seeker racing to view its landing. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTyeLJtOprE)

Another terrible misjudgement of size and scale which *The Hitchhiker's Guide* tells us: "Those who study the complex interplay of cause and effect in the history of the Universe say that this sort of thing is going on all the time, but that we are powerless to prevent it. 'It's just life,' they say."

Andy Kelly
Fylde Coast

Alexa and Bolsonaro

I have noticed that my Alexa hub has started laughing manically at random and at ridiculous times, such as around two in the morning. My cousin has had the same experience. He is more tech-savvy than I am, but is at a loss to explain why this is happening. I seem to recall FT mentioning Alexa hubs behaving badly and am wondering if other readers have encountered their hubs laughing in the early hours sounding like Ming the Merciless or a Bond villain.

- According to Polly Boiko of RT (formerly 'Russia Today', not the most reliable source of genuine news), Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who dismissed Covid-19 as a "mild flu", has

SIMULACRA CORNER



Adam Henderson's girlfriend Caroline took this photo of a demon in the wood panelling wall at bar50 in Cheltenham.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous

forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

urged Brazilians in one of the most heavily infected countries in the world to go out and socialise as usual, whereas it was the drug barons who were advising people to stay indoors and shield. It's quite something when criminals have more concern for public health and safety than the head of state – if it's true.

Phil Brand
London

Candles and owls

The mention of ghostly highway robbers [FT401:35] reminded me obliquely of a curiously morbid tale recounted in *The Guernsey Star* (19 Jan 1889), which also offered a rather recherché explanation for Jack the Ripper's reign of terror. According to the paper, four peasants from Kursk in Russia unsuccessfully tried to rob an elderly farmer and priest. After their failures, they murdered a

girl to make candles from her corpse. The paper reports that superstitions about the power of candles made from corpse fat were "firmly enshrined" among thieves in continental Europe. German criminal codes from the 17th and 18th century, for example, included penalties for making *Diebslichter* (thief candle) and *Schlaflichter* (sleep candle) that supposedly allowed thieves to pass unseen. Apparently, the peasants hoped that the candles would render them invisible during a planned robbery, but the candles didn't do them much good. The candles made the thieves visible; they were caught, confessed, and received "comparatively short terms of imprisonment". The paper reported the views of Rabbi Bloch, a man "of great learning" and a member of the Austrian Reichsrat (Parliament), who suggested that "it was quite probable" that Jack the Rip-

per might have motives similar to those of the Kursk peasants.

- Barry Metcalfe's comment on mental templates of owls and ghosts [FT401:67] resonates with my thoughts – especially if there's even a grain of truth to the story of owl luminosity (FTs passim). Driving around the Fens near where I live, I often catch owls in flight in the headlights. They certainly seem almost luminescent and even ghostly. A softer light could, perhaps, enhance their ghostly ambiance.

Mark Greener
By email

Relic veneration

Lisa Gledhill's article on Virtual Voyages [FT401:76] mentions the virtual chance of seeing shrunken heads in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum. These have recently been taken off display, as complaints were made that they show the relevant tribes in a bad light, as ignorant savages etc. This is surely an example of white colonial paternalism: to the people who made them, these were important valued and respected objects. The "ignorant savage" label is one created by the European gaze. Catholics still venerate parts of – or complete – human bodies; most people, devout or not, do not see these relics as an example of the barbarism of the Church, but as venerated objects.

Bevis Sale
London

Terminal visions

I read the article on deathbed visions of patients [FT398:40-45] with much interest. I am a retired RN who worked on a nursing home/dementia ward for 16 years. I saw patients who were near death look to a corner of the room. They would wave and/or smile in that direction. This was so common that we stopped looking at the wall in that direction.

Gregory Sumrall
Biloxi, Mississippi

A while ago FT published a series of letters about forteana that may have gone unnoticed in otherwise straightforward biographies. I'd

LETTERS

like to add an account that I came across while reading Sir Ray Davies of The Kinks excellent 2013 memoir, *Americana*. The story concerns the death of his mother in 1988.

“The doctors had allowed her to leave the hospital to stay at my sister’s home. According to Gwen, Mum kept talking about ‘a beautiful lady in a long flowing dress’ who kept coming to reassure her and help relieve her pain. Apparently, just before she passed away, Mum called my sister into her room. Her eyes stared past my sister, as if she were looking at a heavenly vision. ‘Gwennie, the woman is there again. The one in the blue dress, and she is telling me not to be afraid.’ Then, according to my sister, my mother’s head dropped back and she passed away.”

Mark Hopper
Hull, East Yorkshire

Pump and circumstance

The 2006 report of Madin Azad Amin facing up to three years in jail after apparently telling Chicago Airport officials that a penis pump in his luggage was a “bomb” [FT401:7] hasn’t aged well. Charges were in fact dropped soon afterwards as it transpired he had actually whispered the word “pump” due to embarrassment in front of his mother and had been misheard. Arabic speakers’ difficulty in differentiating ‘p’ and ‘b’ sounds may have been one factor, racial profiling may have been another. (www.foxnews.com/story/chicago-prosecutors-drop-charges-in-penis-pump-bomb-case)

Mark Graham
Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

The Rat Cat

While sitting at the San Juan Airport in Puerto Rico and waiting for my flight to St Thomas, I got talking to a local man named Sebastian De Leon, who was also flying to St Thomas. In 1978, when he was 16, Sebastian and his father were hiking and exploring El Yunque National



Death Spiral

I walked out on our flagstones this morning [5 Oct 2020] and saw a slug ‘walking’ in circles. Certain this was another sign of the End Times, I wandered about aimlessly until the term ‘Death Spiral’ popped into my head. Sure enough, when I went back the slug had indeed passed to the Other Side. Looking up ‘Death Spiral’, the first description regards planes plummeting from the sky – though I did find a reference to an ‘Ant Mill’ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant_mill) wherein confused army ants will walk in circles until dying of starvation.

I am guessing, however, that even before the invention of the aeroplane, naturalists and gardeners had already witnessed this spiral dance macabre... perhaps this is the original definition?

John Eastman, Santa Cruz, California

Forest when they came upon a strange creature sitting in a tree. It looked like a black and white house cat, but it had a long, hairless tail like a rat’s. Sebastian’s father approached it to get a better look and it spat out an orange substance that missed him by a few inches, landing on some leaves, which started dissolving. Yelling out to Sebastian that the orange substance was some kind of acid, he picked up a rock and threw it at the

creature, which scampered up the tree, leapt onto another tree and disappeared from sight. As Sebastian and his father walked away, they heard a strange beeping sound. Sebastian looked up and saw a bluish orb the size of a Volkswagen hovering in the sky. It appeared to be observing them and hovered for about five minutes before taking off at incredible speed.

Paul Dale Roberts
Sacramento, California

Astrology

Regarding the letter from M G Sherlock denouncing Astrology [FT400:75]: I have had a lifelong interest in astrology as well as astronomy, which began when I was a small boy and flourished when I was about 16 (I am now 75). My introduction to astronomy came when I was about 10, via *The Amateur Astronomer* by Patrick Moore, in which he denounces astrology in no uncertain terms. To my later regret, I took very good heed of this. Later, in about my 16th year, I discovered the work of CG Jung, which has become another lifelong interest. I read of Jung’s own fascination with the subject and his experiments in it. Jung’s writings, as it were, “gave me permission” to pursue my interest in astrology. One of Jung’s daughters, Gret Baumann Jung, became a professional astrologer.

Over the years, I have studied many horoscopes. Some I have done in essay form for study courses so my ideas have been mentored. I have, for example, studied the horoscopes of some of the WWII leaders, great artists such as Picasso and Braque, musicians such as Pablo Cassals, writers such as Evelyn and Auberon Waugh and many lesser known people, family, friends and acquaintances. In the vast majority of them I have discovered fascinating truths, which fitted in with Jung’s own observations. He regarded astrology as “the psychology of the past”. I have also studied what is known as mundane or political astrology, which is the astrology of world events, including some events of WWII and the student riots in France in 1968. In the latter, using astrology, I uncovered events previously unknown to me.

My own feeling about astrology is that as it relies very much on the interpretation of symbols and does not respond well to quantitative statistical analysis. (Neither does art appreciation.) The best approach to astrology, therefore, is through psychically oriented work, such as the writings of Jung, Steiner, Elisabeth Vreede (astronomer and also astrologer) and general Western



esotericism. For a technical introduction, *Teach Yourself Astrology* by Jeff Mayo will get you started. Astrology probably “fits best” with people who have some form of theistic belief and a belief in reincarnation, so atheistic logical positivists might have difficulties. “Getting a hang” on astrology is a long journey, but one worth making as it uncovers so many other fascinating subjects. The really competent astrologer should possess a wide general knowledge, indeed be someone of considerable erudition.

So why are astrologers’ predictions usually ‘tripe’? The modern view of astrology is that it is perhaps not so much a predictive art but more a means of insight into people and situations. Unfortunately, the temptation is for the astrologer to “stick their neck out”, since if the prediction is right it will bring them fame and fortune. Sir Patrick Moore was a very gifted amateur astronomer and a brave man who risked all in WWII (and nearly died), so it pains me to disagree with him about astrology.

Brian Perry
Bridgwater, Somerset

Travelling coffin

“Rum Jamaican Tales” [FT400:17] reminded me of one of my favourite strange phenomena. Several Internet sources say it occurred in the “late 1970s” (see <https://jamaicans.com/tru-story/> or <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110526/cleisure/cleisure4.html>), obviously incorrect for a reason I mention below. Basically, there was a rumour that a three-wheeled coffin containing a duppy (ghost) was travelling around the island, being led, or driven, by three John Crow birds (buzzards) or two, or four, depending on your source. One of the birds was able to talk and asked for “Mr Brown” before moving on, leaving pandemonium in its wake. It created near rioting in Parade in Kingston where some witnesses also mentioned they had seen the coffin going up the steps into the courthouse.

The reason we can be sure it was either very late 1960s or most

likely 1970 is because Bob Marley sings about it in the Bob Marley & The Wailers’ song “Mr Brown”, recorded in Randy’s Studio in Kingston in 1970 and produced by Lee Perry, who released it on his Upsetter label in 1971. That much is indisputable.

The lyrics include lines such as: “Mr Brown is a clown who rides through town in a coffin”

“In the coffin where there is / Three crows on top and two is laughing”

“From Mandeville to Sligoville, coffin running around / Upsetting, upsetting, upsetting the town, asking for Mr Brown”

“Down in Parade, people running like a masquerade” and

“What a thing in town, Crows chauffeur-driven around”.

The song has been reissued many times over the years; it can also be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=amGI5T0JGDc.

Norman Darwen
Lostock, Bolton, Lancashire

Banknote flower

We had a good laugh about the idea that Australian banknotes

portrayed the coronavirus [FT394:5, 399:68]. It’s actually a stylised picture of a wattle bloom, the Australian national flower. As Monty Python said: “This here’s the wattle, the emblem of our land. You can stick it in a bottle, or hold it in your hand.”

Pamela Dyke
By email

Poltergeist voice

I recently watched a 1964 British movie, *Do You Know This Voice?* The plot involves a couple kidnapping a child, and making ransom demands over the phone to the parents. The woman who makes the calls adopts a creepy-sounding voice, and I was struck by how similar this voice sounded to the Enfield Poltergeist voice of ‘Bill’, adopted by Janet Hodgson, captured on reel-to-reel audiotape by investigator Maurice Grosse.

The creepy voice in question appears twice in *Do you know this Voice?* Firstly, through the phone-call made to the kidnapped child’s parents at the 13:25 point of the movie, and then at 23:57, when the police broadcast a reel-to-reel tape recording of the voice

on TV and radio, to appeal for witnesses to come forward. It was the latter scene which reminded me of the Enfield poltergeist ‘voice’; the reel-to-reel tape machine playing the eerily-distorted voice... so uncannily reminiscent of the film footage I’ve seen showing Maurice Grosse playing his own reel-to-reel recording of ‘Bill’.

You might think that this somewhat tenuous and superficial link with the Enfield haunting is just down to my own personal reaction. However, a check on BBC Genome reveals that *Do You Know This Voice?* was broadcast only once: BBC 2, Sunday 13 March 1977, in their Midnight Movie slot. This just happens to be less than five months before the events of the Enfield haunting began. I don’t wish to attempt to debunk the work of Mr Grosse, for whom I have enormous respect; sadly, he is no longer with us to give his views on this. However, I am curious to know if either he or Janet Hodgson saw this movie on TV in 1977, and whether their experiences of this creepy-sounding voice unknowingly played a part in the manufacture of the voice of Bill.



Uncanny

This transformer substation at Niederdollendorf near Bonn, on the Rhine, was built in the form of a human head, designed by Professor Wolfgang Krenz in 1986. Even though it doesn’t qualify as an unintentional simulacrum, it is well worth seeing.

Ulrich Magin *Hennef, Germany*

Festive footnotes



Christmas UFO pilots

Regarding my letter about edible UFOs [FT399:72], I spotted these Christmas tree decorations at my local supermarket on 25 November 2020. I've never come across wild animals piloting UFOs before – especially not such high-status ones rather than domesticated pigs or chickens.

I wonder what gave the creators the idea to make them; do they have two sets of capsules consisting of “things” and “settings”, and just happened to randomly draw out “African animals” and “flying saucers” one week, rather than other combinations like “cats” and “banking”, or “bananas” and “windsurfing”? It brought to mind the notion that Noah's

Ark was actually a visiting/leaving ET spaceship, in line with von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* (1968). Is this yet further proof of humans being “softened up” for accepting new alien animal-based overlords? I didn't buy them as they were glass and expensive. Then, on 6 December, I spotted Santa Claus in a UFO.

- Near my parental home there's a field with something like 10 horse chestnut trees, planted in a perfect circle. Legends amongst the elders in Romford seem to suggest it's either where a hanging post used to be or “to keep in the ghosts of said now long-removed pole/gibbet from escaping”. Has anyone else heard of this practice? Why Chestnuts and not, say, oaks?

James Watson
By email



Arthurian Christmas

A tiny correction to Alan Murdie's ‘Arthurian legend tripping’: the spring to which Arthur and chums ride down from Camelot every Christmas is by the church at Sutton Montis – not ‘Monks’ [FT401:18]. Probably a typo or spellcheck ambush. There must be a joke about a praying montis to be had there somewhere.

Talking of King Arthur's

Christmas, I spent some of my childhood growing up in nearby Queen Camel. A story I was told when still at school was that if you washed your eyes in the Eye Well three times on Christmas morning and looked east to Cadbury Camp you would see Arthur and his men sleeping inside the hollow fort. The Eye Well is on the back road, along the River Cam, leading from Queen Camel to the hamlet of Wales.

Bert Gray-Malkin
Portishead, Bristol

Has anyone else seen *Do You Know This Voice?* – or possess the Network release of the DVD – and, if so, what is their opinion on the apparent similarities, or otherwise, between this movie’s creepy voice and the creepy voice of the Enfield poltergeist?

Ed Hodson

Winchester, Hampshire

Recent evolution

Regarding the absence of wisdom teeth and smaller jaws being attributed to the cooking and processing of our food [FT401:23]: hasn’t this been going on for millennia? I wonder if the ‘recent’ trend could be connected to the use of the knife and fork. This has enabled cultures that use them to chew on ‘bite-sized’ chunks, which has altered our facial appearance by dispensing with the need to develop strong jaw muscles. Perhaps wisdom teeth then became more of a liability – becoming impacted – than an advantage, and natural selection operated accordingly.

I wonder if the Chinese, for example, have a similar or greater lack of wisdom teeth, having started using chopsticks way before ‘the West’ adopted the knife and fork. Regarding the additional bones and abnormal connections mentioned, I wonder if it is partly a case of advances in medical science making these anomalies apparent, and partly a case of these anomalies not needing to be selected out in modern society.

I have difficulty understanding how natural selection could account for the retention of the median artery, usually only seen in unborn babies. Are adults with this artery far more successful than us ‘ordinary’ people, and is it an inherited characteristic? Even if the answer is yes to both questions, I cannot see how these triple-arteried “supermen” (and women) could become common in only 80 years. Couldn’t there be other, possibly environmental, factors involved?

According to the report, “humans are evolving at a faster rate than at any point in the past 250 years”. Are we really evolving at

a rate that could even be noticed over 250 years? For example, in Western cultures it is recognised that people are taller on average than historically, but I’ve always believed this to be attributed to diet and other cultural factors. Similarly, the change in facial appearance with the advent of the knife and fork is simply due to us having less muscular jaws.

Dave Miles

By email

Red Reich

Theories about Hitler’s post-war survival remind me of a unique theory I encountered on a hot 1966 night on a Continental Trailways bus speeding through northern Texas. On my little portable radio I tuned in to successive local radio stations in the small towns we passed. On one station a local preacher announced he had made an important discovery: Hitler was a Communist. Our intrepid investigator had studied Adolf’s life and found there was a gap of a year in the record of Hitler’s whereabouts in the early 1920s.

“This was when he was in Moscow receiving training from his Communist masters,” we were told. “On his return to Germany he used the well-known Communist techniques of agitation and debate to gain power. Eventually he was able to declare war on the West. Of course, he had to declare war on Russia as well to make it look good. At the end of the war he disappeared, and I believe he returned to Moscow, shaved off his moustache, and is still there working for the overthrow of democracy.”

Can this brave discovery be disproved? Didn’t all the evidence for Hitler’s bunker death come from Communist sources – or else from no doubt sympathetic ‘scientists’?

Ewan McVicar

Cromarty, Scottish Highlands

Distant sirens

Your article “Distant Early Warnings” [FT399:44-49] brought back childhood memories of growing up here in New York City and

visiting relatives nearby. In the mid 1960s our local Civil Defence siren was sounded every day at noon. All the kids, not thinking a whit of nuclear doom, knew it was time for lunch. We had no real mental connection to the Cold War fears our parents obviously had with the sound. My friends and I gained a child’s sense of accomplishment when we finally figured out which apartment building had the siren installed on the roof. We would look at it when it went off; it was like sighting an animal you usually only heard.

Initially we could hear the noon siren from several buildings around the city, but as time wore on fewer and fewer sirens would go off. At some point the noon sirens stopped, maybe in the mid-1970s. Occasionally in the 1980s, a siren was tested at odd times during the business day. These days I live near a church that rings its bells every morning at 7am and my office is near a church that rings at noon. Just now thinking of the childhood sirens, I realised that my childhood religious sounds were the CD sirens and the real doom fears they embodied as opposed to the spiritual doom fears the church bells embody.

Also in the 1960s and 70s, when we went visiting relatives upstate, I remember the sounds of distant horn blasts that would sound several times at seemingly arbitrary times. The echoes and the inscrutable codes that the horns seemed to be putting across were very evocative to me as a child – especially at night when everything was silent except for crickets and frogs. Unlike train horns or boat horns, these were a mystery sound with no known source. My relatives didn’t seem to know what the horn blasts were for, but I now suspect they were for volunteer emergency services with the horn count alerting either fire or medical support personnel.

William Hohauser

New York

“Distant Early Warnings” both intrigued me and awoke memories. In the 1970s, I was a child in

Plumstead, an area of southeast London, literally just uphill from Woolwich. My mother and sister had jobs on the construction of the Woolwich flood barrier and Steve Toase’s mention of the sirens heralding the raising of the barrier in rehearsal made me recall (I think) that even before the ground was broken on the construction project, “flood alert” sirens were sounded as a rehearsal. I think it was always on a Sunday morning around 11am. I remember vividly hearing them and being told what they were. My father was working in security over the river in Silvertown warehouses, so would have good reason to know about them.

Does anyone else remember the sirens over SE London?

Alan Cassady-Bishop

Filey, North Yorkshire

Speaking from a UK perspective, it is often difficult to identify where a siren sound originates, and this is particularly unsettling when you are driving. You hear the noise, but have no idea where the emergency vehicle is, and whether you should prepare to pull over. The same problem occurs with office telephones in open-plan offices. Whereas many years ago they had a jingling sound, and tended to have a fixed volume, so that you had an idea where the phone was, these days the sound is too ‘vague’ to locate easily.

Dave Miles

By email



KNITWEAR ON ELM STREET

NICK MALORET

It Happened to Me...

Little Devil's hoofprints

My sister and I have always been fans of spooky and unnerving stories, and particularly those associated with Devon and Dartmoor, our favourite holiday destination as kids. We both, therefore, knew the 'Devil's Hoofprints' story better than any other, and as a laugh, every time it snowed we always – as a joke – checked to see if we could find hoofprints.

It was all very amusing, until decades later, in 2010. I used to live in Warwickshire, and that year we had a particularly long and cold snowy spell. Our family had organised dinner at a restaurant, so we were waiting for our parents to get themselves together and, as it was snowing, we reverted to childhood and amused ourselves with a hoofprint hunt.

This time, to our consternation, we actually found them. A set of little tracks leading right up to the side of the house (see photo). They were hoofprints, clear as anything, neat and well-shod. They weren't exactly devilish, more little demon-ish, being no more than about 1-2in (2.5-5cm) wide, arranged in a neat trotting row. They weren't dead straight, doing a little meander until they hit the wall. But they didn't go back again, and so not quite believing what we were seeing, and convinced it was just an animal of some kind, we went back in the house and leaned out of the kitchen window, which was directly opposite the line of hoofprints on the other side of the house. And sure enough, there they were, starting dead against the wall below the window before trotting off again in a thin line out across my neighbour's garden and into the shrubbery beyond.

The thing that we really couldn't get was that they went right up to the wall one side, and came away right



Every time it snowed we always checked to see if we could find hoofprints

against it the other. If it were an animal (we had muntjacs aplenty round there) it would have turned around and gone the other way. If it were a meteorological phenomenon (the most likely explanation) then it would have begun away from the wall on the lee side of the house. As for bird prints, I've never seen a bird with round feet.

I appreciate the photo is vague, that as evidence it's poor and could have been faked, but all I can say is that the thing happened. I'm also not saying it was supernatural; I think it most likely a weather phenomenon, a line of hail in the snow overnight perhaps. But it was, and remains, inexplicable. Needless to say, my sister and I continue, in fine old tradition, to keep an eye out when it snows, but we haven't seen it again. Yet.

Ms Tansy Kelly Robson
By email

Editor's note: See "The Devil's hoofmarks" by Mike Dash, Fortean Studies #1, pp.71-150; "Devil's hoofprints" by Ben Radford, FT70:65.

Phantomjay walker

I found the feature about the Ruskington Horror [FT401:32-38] very absorbing. As a lorry driver, I have travelled along that particular stretch of the A15 many times, but have never encountered anything untoward, except the usual bad driving prevalent on that road. However, in 2005 I did have a mysterious and maybe ghostly encounter 20 miles [32km] further south in Lincolnshire near the village of Corby Glen, midway between Grantham and Bourne. I was driving along the A151 towards the A1. It was a very dark but clear winter's evening at about 6.30pm and I was about half a mile west of the main east coast railway line, travelling at 45 to 50mph [72-80km/h]. I had just switched my headlights to full beam when I was very shocked to see a man standing near the centre of the road about 50m [164ft] in front of me. He was motionless and facing towards me, and had a prominent bushy beard. He was wearing a quilted 'bomber' type jacket, white trousers like a chef might wear and a woolly hat. Luckily, there was no traffic heading in the opposite direction and I was able to swerve around him.

The thing that convinced me he wasn't of this world was the fact that a taxi, travelling very closely behind me

(way too close in fact), an annoyance for many miles, didn't take similar action to avoid the man. Given his position near the centre of the fairly wide road, I don't believe he could have made it to either grass verge in the few seconds' space between our vehicles. I stopped a bit further on and the taxi overtook me and continued on its way. It occurred to me that perhaps the taxi had been involved in a hit and run, so I turned round and went back to check, but there was nothing to be seen. I checked local media for days afterwards, but there was no report of anyone being involved in an accident along that stretch of road.

I did hear a FOAF (friend-of-a-friend) story about a young woman having a similar encounter at the same place a few years later, but couldn't get any more details.

Paul Clark
Grantham, Lincolnshire

Orange orb

I woke up in the early hours one day in June 2018, possibly due to a strange light. About 10ft [3m] away was a steady, floating orange orb or ball of fizzing orange light. The orb was about a foot [30cm] wide and was 'floating' a third of the way up the door. It did not make any sound. I raised myself up on an elbow to get a better look and considered waking my wife, but didn't do so as she is a heavy sleeper and I reasoned by the time she awoke the anomaly might have disappeared. As I raised myself upon my elbow, the orb appeared to 'notice' my observations and slowly retreated out of the room. What I particularly noticed about this retreat was our bedroom door closed or pulled-to smoothly as the orb retreated. Have any readers had a similar experience?

Rowan Callcels
Edinburgh

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Fortean Traveller



125. Mysterious Bari

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE visits the capital of Puglia, Italy, and explores some of its more unusual traditions and treasures

Bari, in the south of Italy on the Adriatic coast, is the capital of Puglia and an attractive place for lovers of sun, sea and good food. Fresh fish are a speciality, with Bari's working fishermen being known for their unusual method of dispatch upon netting an octopus; biting into its head for a quick kill!

Still a working port with an industrial zone to the north-west, Bari is best approached from the south-east along the coastal road. The sea is directly to the right, while on the left, an elegant parade of modernist buildings from the Fascist era follows the curve of the promenade leading into the city.

Ahead, the visitor will see the tall campanile (bell tower) of Bari's Romanesque cathedral of San Sabino (for centuries, used by sailors as a navigation aid) in the centre of Vecchia Bari (Old Bari), a well-preserved mediæval walled town. Its maze of narrow alleyways have a hint of a Middle Eastern souk or of old Jerusalem. Vespas and bicycles whizz through these alleys past little shops and bars. Not having been overtaken by the tourist industry, local people still live in Old Bari, as can be seen by the clothes hanging out to dry from windows, and on washing lines strung across its backstreets.

It is easy to become lost in this labyrinth, but some of its streets open out onto piazzas which offer relief to the claustrophobic. One such, the Piazza Mercantile, the old marketplace, features a marble column mounted on a circular base, a sculpture of an angry-looking lion at its base.¹ On the lion's collar is inscribed "CUSTOS IUSTICIAE" (Guardian of Justice). Legend has it that Bari's debtors were made to sit on the lion with



hands raised, which were then tied or chained to the Colonna Infame (Column of Infamy). The unfortunate debtors were then subjected to public mockery, or worse – a flogging. Certainly, towards the top of the column, several indentations around the its circumference can be seen. An alternative, if more prosaic, explanation is that the column was once located on Bari's dockside, and that sailors would tie their ship's hawsers around it when moored.

A more curious column may be found in the crypt of the Basilica of San Nicola (Saint Nicholas, 270-343 AD), also built in the Romanesque style. This is the legendary "flying column" of red porphyry which is kept in a cage to prevent it from flying away. Women seeking a husband would traditionally circle the column seven times on St Nicholas's feast day, 6 December. That the column is still believed to possess great power is evinced by the numerous pieces of folded paper at its foot, upon which petitioners have written their prayers or requests.

The bones of Saint Nicholas, the original Father Christmas



TOP: Bari's old marketplace, home to the 'Column of Infamy', to which, according to local lore, the city's debtors were once chained. **ABOVE:** The Cathedral of San Sabino, with its great rose window and campanile.

SAILKO / CREATIVE COMMONS

BERTHOLD WERNER / CREATIVE COMMONS



and the patron saint of Russia, are housed in his tomb in the crypt – reportedly the site of a repeated miraculous manifestation of manna. Nicholas devotees argue whether the manna springs from the saint's actual bones, or from his tomb, both being holy. Unlike the Old Testament version, this manna isn't food, but liquid. Half a litre or more is regularly found in the tomb, which on 9 May each year is collected in bottles and distributed to the faithful. One sample was analysed at the University of Bari's Department of Chemistry in 1925; they found the liquid to be water. Nevertheless, the exact process by which the manna is produced has remained a mystery.

Since he is their country's patron saint, many Russians come to Bari, especially in December for his feast day. Such is the basilica's popularity with these modern-day pilgrims that its signage is written in both Italian and Russian Cyrillic. Nicholas doesn't have any original historical association with Bari, or even Puglia; the holy relics of the saint were in effect stolen from the church of St Nicholas in Myra, Lycia (south-west Turkey). In 1087, Seljuk Turks overran Myra and, during the ensuing chaos, a band of enterprising Barese sailors who happened to be in the vicinity grabbed the saint's bones and took them to Bari (FT56:42-45).

These relics certainly helped

The legendary 'flying column' is in a cage to prevent it from flying away

enhance Bari's popularity and prestige, and in terms of worldwide fame, Bari's Saint Nicholas and his Basilica have eclipsed its Cathedral, named for the city's patron saint, St Sabino (or Sabinus, 461-566),

Bishop of nearby Canosa; before the town was about to fall to the Saracens, his bones were taken to Bari for safekeeping in 844. The two columns flanking the Cathedral doors are each supported by large stone bulls; they once sported golden horns, though only the sockets now remain.

Immediately to the right of the cathedral's main entrance is a glass-enclosed podium upon which lies the body of a woman clad in a beautiful dress. This is Saint Columba, and the skin of her face, hands and feet are shrunken and shrivelled, teeth protruding from peeled-back

lips. The restored embalmment is an unsettling sight, as she appears to be merely sleeping and one has the distinct impression that she could wake at any moment. Her actual bones are supposedly housed in a reliquary in the crypt.

Sabinus's statue in his eponymous Cathedral is accompanied by an inscription declaring the saint to have been an implacable foe of pagans and paganism. This is strange, as the cathedral has several elements suggestive of pre-Christian beliefs having been incorporated into the design of the building during its



TOP LEFT: An Orthodox bishop celebrates mass at the tomb of Saint Nicholas. **TOP RIGHT:** One of the faithful touches the legendary 'flying column' of red porphyry in the crypt of the Basilica of Saint Nicholas. **ABOVE:** The unusual mosaic of a huge serpent found on the floor of the crypt in the Cathedral of San Sabino.



construction between the late 12th and 13th centuries.

Part of the crypt's floor proudly features the mosaic of a huge, sinuous serpent, not what one usually expects to see in a Christian church. The present building stands on the ruins of a Byzantine cathedral (destroyed by William the Bad in 1156). Through a rose window high up on the facade of the cathedral streams sunlight, which, on 21 June, the Summer Solstice (and only on this day), slowly creeps along the floor of the nave. At precisely 5.10pm (17.10) the sunlight falls upon a marbled design echoing that of the rose window.

Why 17.10? ² No-one is quite sure, but this Midsummer ceremony, which takes place in the cathedral each year to a packed audience, is certainly an impressive sight. A procession of 18 young women (to match the 18 'petals' of the rose window) appear, dressed in white robes and flowered garlands. They circle the rose design on the floor, as incense smoke rises in plumes and curlicues up to the ceiling amid the shafts of sunlight. The white dresses are perhaps suggestive of the Cathars, while the flowers (and the dancing around an ornamental tree) indicate pagan fertility rites. ³

Visitors to Old Bari should not miss the impressive, imposing castle, whose construction was begun in 1131 by Roger the Norman and continued by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, stupor mundi ('the wonder of the world,' so named for his



TOP: The embalmed remains of Saint Columba in the crypt of the Cathedral of San Sabino. ABOVE CENTRE: A southern Italian Mothman in Bari's castle? ABOVE: Midsummer rites at the Cathedral of San Sabino.

achievements both in war and in diplomacy, and for his great learning and enquiring mind).

The castle's halls and chambers contain various striking carvings and decorations in the forms of beasts, real and mythical. An eagle, Frederick's symbol (he was very fond of falconry, and famously wrote a manual on the subject) is a recurring feature. Griffons and sphinxes also appear. One of the more peculiar examples is found in a room of plaster casts, the originals being elsewhere in Bari or the surrounding area.

Among green men and Baphomet-like heads is a bas-relief (from the Cathedral of San Nicola Pellegrino – another Nicholas – in Trani, Puglia) that depicts a strange beast. It is captioned as a 'leone' – but whoever heard of a lion with horns? Perhaps it is instead an early, South Italian manifestation of Mothman...

A big thank you to Marileda Maggi, my guide to Old Bari, without whom the above would not have been possible.

Getting there: Bari has its own airport, and under normal travel conditions two high-speed trains run from Rome each day and it is also a regular stop for cruise ships.

NOTES

¹ The column is believed to date from the early 16th century, while the lion is thought to have been taken from a first century Roman villa. This early form of architectural salvage was widespread during Italy's mediæval and Renaissance periods.

² Is it because these numbers add up to 18, the number of 'petals' on the rose (the remainder of the church appears to have been designed according to the sacred geometry of the number eight)? Or does it refer to chapter 17 verse 10 of Revelation, which states that of "seven kings, five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come", perhaps relating to the seven pairs of animals around the rose window on the facade. Others have suggested that the number 17 is associated with the Knights Templar, who played a significant role in Bari's early mediæval history, and that the number 10 signifies spiritual perfection or human divinity.

³ There are several videos of the ceremony available on YouTube.

✦ **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** is FT's news editor and was previously a regular contributor to the magazine. He is currently working on his second book, a biography of Dr Eric Dingwall.

PECULIAR POSTCARDS



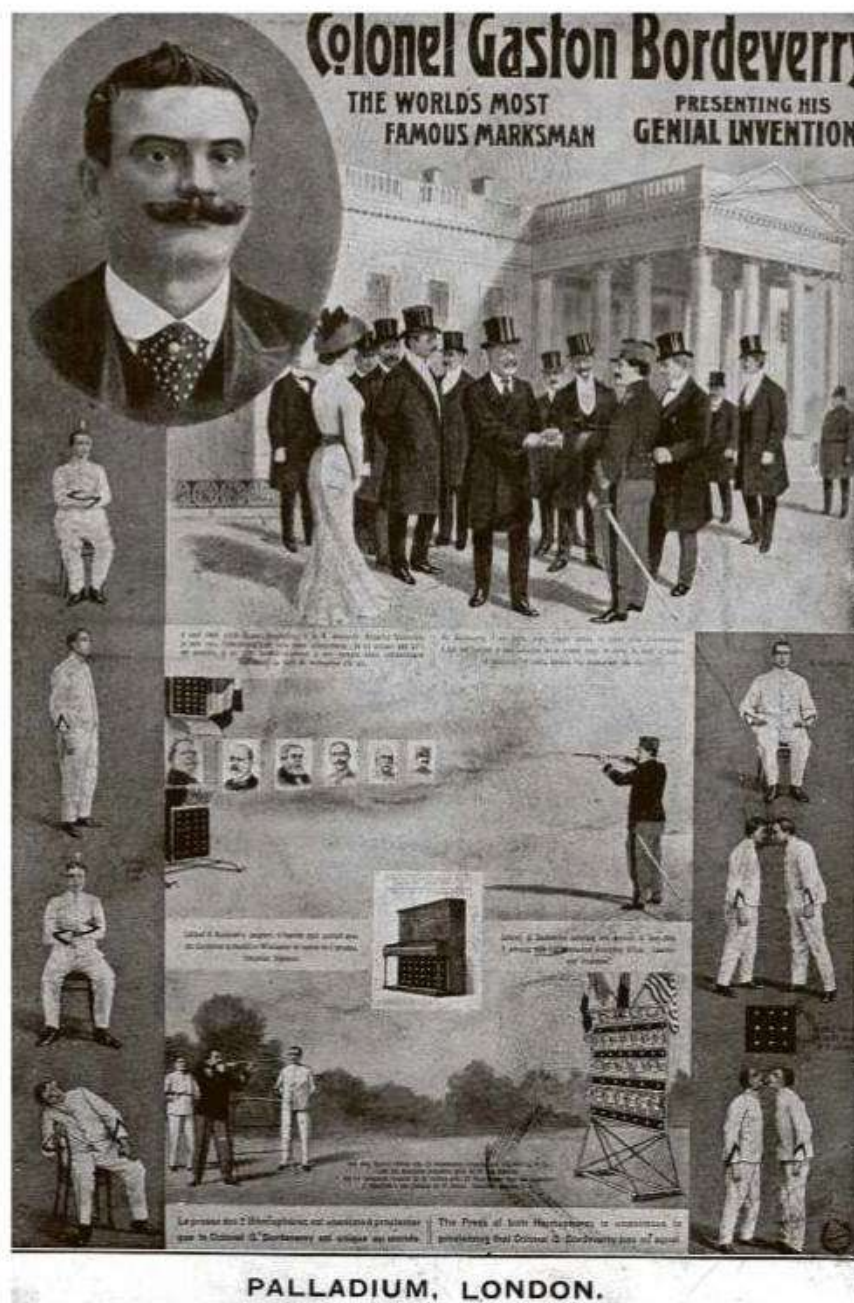
JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past traces the career of a sharpshooting Frenchman who set his sights on worldwide fame

13. BORDEVERRY, THE MASTER MARKSMAN

Gaston Bordeverry was a young Frenchman, born in Pau, at the edge of the Pyrenees, sometime in the 1870s. He trained as an interpreter and moved to Bordeaux at an early age, setting up business as a wine merchant, albeit without much success. He was very fond of shooting and proud of his considerable talent as a marksman. After winning a number of prizes at provincial shooting displays, he went to Paris, where the *Figaro* newspaper had arranged a grand shooting competition in 1897. Bordeverry dazzled the Parisians with his prowess as a marksman, and he soon received offers to perform in the variety halls. Life as a music hall artist suited him very well, and his wife and daughter became his assistants, having small coins and other objects shot from their heads. In a rather *risqué* routine, the wife had the buttons in her dress shot away, becoming disrobed as a consequence.

In January 1898, Colonel Gaston Bordeverry, as he called himself in his show business career, made his debut at the Royal Music Hall in London. His well-aimed bullets broke glass balls suspended a few inches above his wife's head, extinguished a cigarette she was smoking, and lit an erect Lucifer match. After two months in London, he went on to tour the provinces for two full years, visiting most larger cities. In January 1899, the *Royal Magazine* had a feature on 'The Best Shot in the World'. The swaggering Bordeverry showed off his skills, shooting various objects from the head of his sturdy, uncomplaining wife, and posing for the magazine's photographer.

In early 1902, he was back in Paris, where he presented an improved routine at a



ABOVE: A postcard showing Colonel Gaston Bordeverry during his engagement at the Palladium in London.

show sponsored by the *Figaro* newspaper. He first went through his 'Wilhelm Tell' act, shooting a lump of sugar and a 50-centime piece from the head of his servant. He then took several repeating carbines and stood 10 yards from a specially armoured piano, firing a fusillade of bullets to make it play a complicated selection from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, while a quartet party sang the words. Nothing even remotely like this show had ever been seen on the Parisian stage, and there were

extraordinary scenes as the audience cheered the master marksman.

In 1904, Bordeverry left to conquer the United States. He was a great success at the New York Hippodrome. In May 1905, there was a mishap during the routine when he shot away his wife's buttons to remove her outer clothes, and a bullet passed through her cheek. Bordeverry lodged a complaint with a former assistant of his for tampering with his rifle-sight. Shooting his

wife did not deter the master marksman from trying other foolhardy displays, like shooting a lump of sugar from the head of a lady volunteer from the audience. While performing in Washington, he was received at the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt, who shook his hand and complimented him on his marksmanship. After spending three full years in America, Bordeverry was back in London in May 1908, advertising in the *Era* theatrical newspaper for further employment, and touring Hull, Manchester, Leeds and Exeter.

In 1913, he went on a tour of South Africa. His health was no longer good, and he suffered from gout and Bright's disease. After having performed two nights at the Hall-by-the-Sea music hall in Durban, he suffered a severe paralytic stroke at the Hotel Lowther and died at a sanatorium three weeks later. His 'wife', named as 'Ruby de Fontenoy', was currently on tour herself in the United States, and his adult daughter was a member of the Mirza Golem Troupe, performing in Germany. Ruby (real name Ruby Blackledge) was clearly not the same 'wife' Bordeverry had shown to the *Royal Magazine* back in 1899, but a good deal younger and more attractive, and a sharpshooter in her own right. Bordeverry had earned a good deal of money during his 15 years in show business, but he had spent it all on his various amusements: when his will was read in London on 29 October 1913, Ruby Blackledge, spinster, inherited just £96 and change. 'Ruby de Fontenoy' went on to tour the United States for several years as the 'Champion Girl Shot of the World', until the Great War ended her career in 1916.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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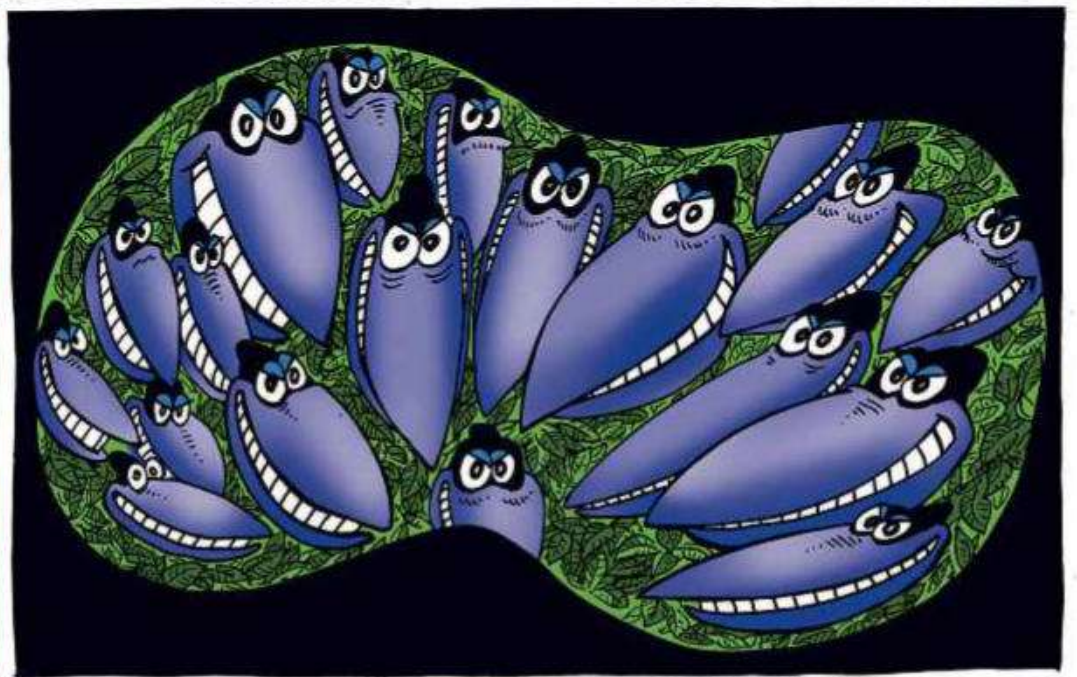
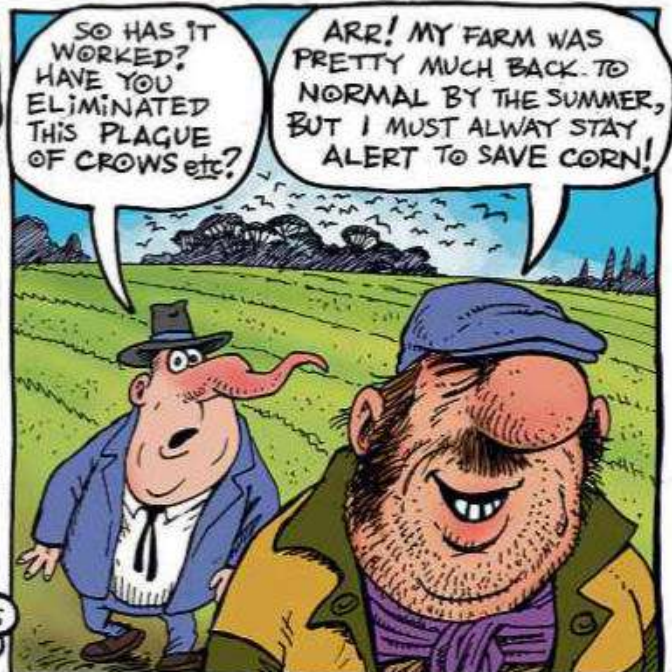
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PHENOMENOMIX

HUNT EMERSON & ROB GANDY



COMING NEXT MONTH



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SHIRLEY HITCHINGS AND THE
BATTERSEA POLTERGEIST



ART AND OCCULTURE

EXPLORING THE SECRETS OF
THE MUSEO DEL PRADO



KIWI GOLDEN DAWN,
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FORTEAN TIMES 404

ON SALE 25 MAR 2021

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

An Italian pensioner was mauled to death by her pet Czechoslovakian wolfdogs. Mariangela Zaffino, 74, of Grugliasco, near Turin, was attacked by the five dogs in her apartment; some of her neighbours had expressed concern about Mrs Zaffino and her daughter keeping five large dogs in a small flat. She was found by her daughter, who stated that the dogs had never before shown any signs of being dangerous. Police officer Massimo Penz confirmed the dogs had been legally registered with the authorities, adding: "We had never had any complaints about the dogs' behaviour." Police are now trying to ascertain what may have prompted Ares, Aylen, Artù, Aragorn and Apache to attack their owner.

The five animals have been taken into care while the authorities decide what to do with them, and Mrs Zaffino's death has prompted a debate as to whether the breed should remain legal. The increasingly popular crossbreed was recognised as a distinct breed in 1982; it was created in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s when an Alsatian was crossed with a Carpathian wolf in an attempt to produce aggressive animals to be used as guard dogs along the Iron Curtain. Slenderer than wolves, they share many of the same physical characteristics; they are highly intelligent, hard to train, need a lot of exercise, and are renowned for their strength and stamina. Males can weigh more than 50lb (23kg) while females weigh up to 45lb (20kg).

Fabrizio Rondalino, a professional dog trainer, said that while wolfdogs are loyal to their trainers, they can quickly turn on and attack anyone else. "The breed has a highly developed predatory instinct. It should not be allowed to exist. It is a man-made invention, one of the worst breeds created." He believes all remaining wolfdogs in Italy should be sterilised and the breed allowed to die out. *D.Telegraph, 21 Dec 2020.*

Sam Mazzola, an exotic animal owner who made headlines when one of his black bears fatally mauled one of his staff, died the following year after apparently choking on a sex toy. Brent Kandra, 24, was attacked after she opened the bear's enclosure for a routine feeding.

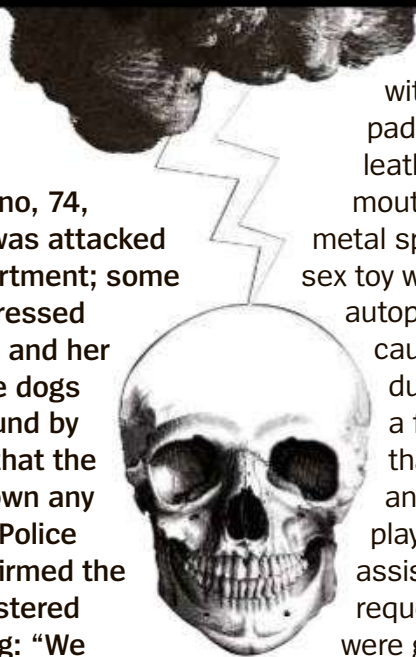
In 2011 Mr Mazzola, 49, was found dead in his Ohio home face down on a water bed. He was bound to the bed

with handcuffs, chains and padlocks. He was wearing a leather mask with the eyes and mouth zipped shut and a two-piece metal sphere covering his head. A sex toy was found in his throat and the autopsy determined the preliminary cause of death to be asphyxia due to airway obstruction by a foreign object. It appeared that Mr Mazzola had died from an accident during sexual role play that would have required an assistant. "He had done this by request according to the story we were given," the coroner reported. *msnbc.com, 13 July 2011.*

A Russian oligarch known as the 'Sausage King' was murdered with a crossbow while in his home sauna. Meat tycoon Vladimir Marugov, 54, was in the sauna with his girlfriend Sabina Gaziyeva, 36, when a masked gang stormed his home and demanded cash. Ms Gaziyeva managed to escape and call for help, but by the time police officers arrived at the scene, Mr Marugov was found dead in the sauna. It appeared he had been tortured before being shot by the crossbow. *D.Mail, 3 Nov 2020.*

A two-year-old suffered massive internal bleeding and died after accidentally swallowing a toilet freshener. Arietta-Grace Barnett is believed to be the first person to die after ingesting such a product, in this case a Toilet Duck disc-shaped tablet made of gel. After she began vomiting bright pink liquid she was rushed to hospital where doctors debated whether she had actually swallowed the capsule, despite her four-year-old sister saying she had seen Arietta-Grace do so. Deciding it was unlikely the toilet cleaning product was toxic, doctors instead treated her for a stomach bug; her condition improved and she was discharged after five days. A week later, however, her mother, Ms Lucy Cook, discovered Arietta-Grace in bed, bleeding from the mouth and nose. She was again taken to hospital but suffered a cardiac arrest and died.

An inquest heard how the Toilet Duck product, designed to adhere to a lavatory bowl while slowly releasing chemicals for up to 12 weeks, may have attached itself to the two-year-old's oesophagus. A post-mortem established that she had died after an ulcer on her oesophagus had created a hole in a major blood vessel. *D.Mail; <i>, 6 Nov 2020.*



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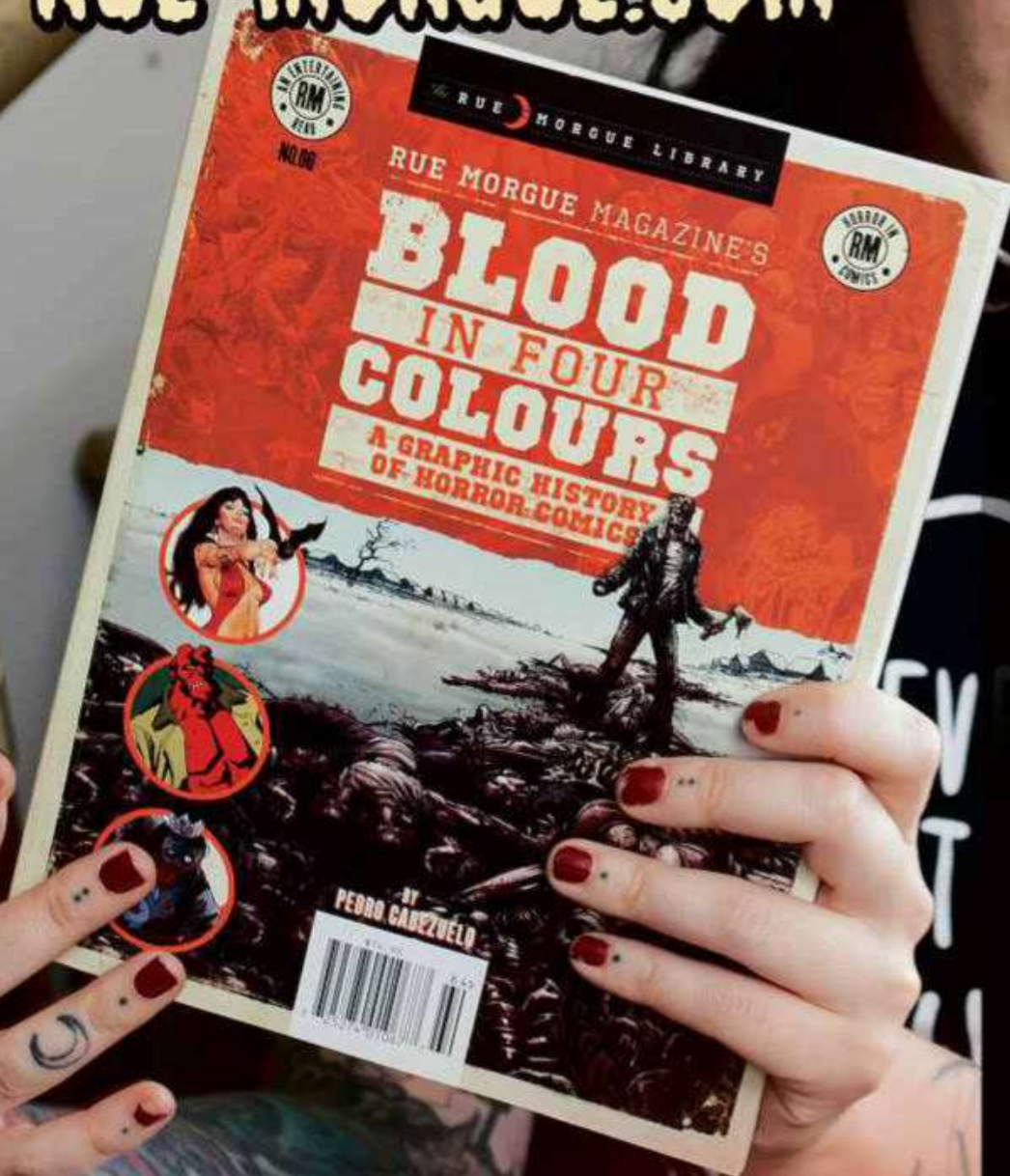
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